

2010

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## Volume 54, no. 4: October-December 2010

Congregation of the Mission

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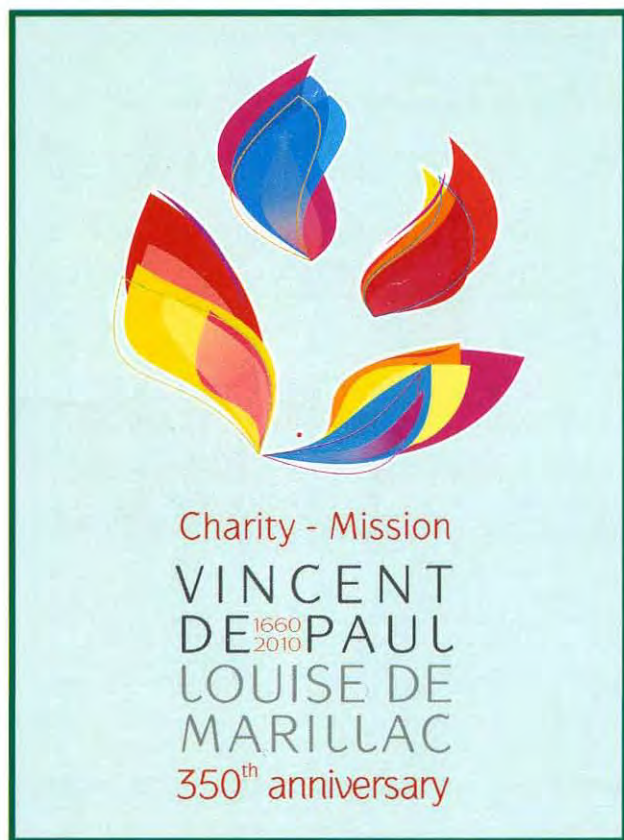
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# VINCENTIANA

54<sup>th</sup> Year - N. 4

October-December 2010



## Vincentian Reflections in a Year of Grace

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
GENERAL CURIA

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# GENERAL CURIA

## MISSION AWARD FOR 2010

Rome, 30 July 2010

*To the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

In the context of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of our Founders and our emphasis on "Charity and Mission" and through the example of St. Justin de Jacobis on whose feast we present these Awards, I announce to the worldwide Congregation the five projects that were granted the **Mission Award for 2010**. I want to thank the recipients of this award for their missionary creativity in their evangelization of the poor. I hope that all the projects presented will help to stimulate missionary creativity among confreres in other provinces.

Here is a brief description of each of the projects.

### **Curitiba, Brazil**

**Project to revive the faith and the life of the small farmers in the District of Jaciaba, Prudentópolis, Paraná**

The parish of Saint John the Baptist in the Diocese of Guarapuava, the state of Paraná is ministered by four Vincentian priests of the Congregation of the Mission, the Province of Curitiba. The parish extends for 2,307,897 square kilometers and is composed of seventy-nine communities (chapels) which are about forty kilometers from the main parish center... 50% of the roads are gravel, another 40% are dirt roads and 10% are asphalt.

The parish is subdivided into ten pastoral sectors which enables the missionaries to better minister to the people. The District of Jaciaba has two sectors: Jaciaba and Erva Fraqueza with twenty-three communities... the closest community is 50 kilometers away and the most distant one is 113 kilometers and are very difficult to reach... when it rains the only means of travel is either by foot or horse.

The population of the district is approximately five thousand inhabitants who earn their living through the cultivation of beans, corn and rice. The people are experiencing a gradual process of material and spiritual impoverishment, victims of the lack of a farm policy that is geared toward agricultural workers who live and work on small parcels of land.

Each year the communities become smaller as people, especially adolescents and young adults, migrate to the urban centers in search of better living conditions. Young people in the rural areas see no future there because of the lack of political support, technical support and above all the lack of agricultural associations and cooperatives.

Because of this phenomenon of the exodus from the rural areas, the communities (chapels) have no structure and the pastoral activities and many other services become lifeless and lose sight of their objectives. Families are torn apart by alcoholism, drugs, domestic violence, prostitution and the disorder of the usual customs.

At the present time the parish has a plan for Biblical-pastoral formation and the preparation of leaders for different forms of ministry as well as leaders for the different movements and associations. All of this is an attempt at a gradual, integral promotion to call Catholic Christians within the framework of the Document of Aparecida, the fruit of the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops.

This plan offers: a theology course for lay people; a Biblical school with eight levels; a post-graduate course in philosophy, human, ethical and Christian values; shorter courses for the formation of catechists, ministers of the popular missions, coordinators of different pastoral models and coordinators of pastoral councils in the communities.



**Guatemala, Central America**  
**Saint Vincent de Paul Parish**  
**Colonia Bethania**

*Woe is me if I do not evangelize!*

Aware of the fact that evangelization is a fundamental task of the Christian and because this task has not been assumed with responsibility and love, people have wandered in directions different from those marked out by Jesus. Our parish wanted to set out in a new direction and five years ago initiated a parish reorganization based on a team approach to ministry. Beginning with the formation of pastoral agents we were able to engage in a missionary endeavor under the words: *Woe is me if I do not evangelize!*

The missionary work was initiated three years ago and in stages we reached out to every one of the sectors of Bethania which resulted in the creation of "mission houses" among the residences of those evangelized.

In the present year we are making efforts to clarify these bonds so that our parish can become a missionary parish par excellence, with a permanent and systematic evangelization process. In a one month period we plan to reach out to the main center of each sector where the popular mission has not yet been preached. This effort represents a great financial expense which we are unable to cover. Even though the missionaries are willing to engage in this evangelizing effort, we need to prepare them for said mission.

The purpose of the project is to form evangelizers so that as a result of the mission they become integrated into the "mission houses," thus becoming pastoral agents. With this greater number of missionaries we will be able to evangelize those who have been baptized but who, for one reason or another, have distanced themselves from the Church. We hope to be able to integrate these individuals into the life of the parish as true Catholic Christians and also promote vocations in these different sectors.

**El Alto, Bolivia**  
**"A Mobile Platform for Internet-based Vincentian Formation"**

- The project is primarily intended for use in missions *ad gentes*, where technology and infrastructure are rudimentary.
- The project is primarily new media-oriented, creatively capitalizing on advanced technology.

- The project is primarily a lay formation program — especially VMY (JMV), AIC, SSVDP and lay leaders of the parishes of Mocomoco and Italaque, but materials and technology will be utilized for Vincentian clergy and diocesan clergy formation.

I have been experimenting with different social media connections (Facebook and other social networking platforms, Twitter, Youtube, Flickr), and using VinFormation materials to resource and educate youth groups and Vincentian lay Missionaries-USA for several years now. Working as a volunteer technical advisor with Aymara youth who provide tri-lingual (Aymara, Spanish, English) cultural and political news here in Bolivia has encouraged me to think digitally along with the younger generation of Bolivians. The formation needs on the Altiplano are great, and responses to those needs are in their technological infancy in the diocese — mostly due to lack of experience and knowledge of what technologies are available and how cost effective they can be. As Bolivia slowly develops an internet infrastructure, its rural areas will lag considerably behind the developed regions. As the youth of the rural sectors continue to have both secondary and university level education in the city of La Paz, their expectations of formational experiences grow apace. Formation in the Vincentian charism, Church teaching, and pastoral practice are the needs identified in the Diocesan pastoral plan and our own community and parochial plans. This project is a response on all these levels of needs and expectations. The technology is available to deliver quality formation programs in heretofore inaccessible rural, poor areas. We envision a small unit that is easy to transport and assemble, durable and totally self-contained.

This project will:

- Present the Vincentian community as a contemporary community with an orientation toward the future — a likely place to live out one's vocation to the brotherhood or priesthood if God is calling.
- Provide the opportunity to demonstrate the utility of internet-based formation with a moderate capital infusion, considering the numbers of people who can be reached.

### **Goal**

To provide continual Vincentian and Marian formation to the Vincentian Family and its collaborators in the Northern Zone of the Diocese of El Alto, Bolivia, and to resource the entire Vincentian Family with our products and experience.



## Ethiopia

### Popular Missions

Marking the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Justin De Jacobis, the Ethiopian Province would like to dedicate its ministry by being involved in popular missions in two dioceses and three vicariates in Ethiopia all through the year assisting lay ministers and Diocesan priests to be interested in success and committed to effective mission.

Many of our local churches in Ethiopia have developed a preoccupation with their weaknesses, their problems, and their concerns. They are mostly focusing on their past and being reluctant to recognize the strengths God has shared with them that they might be in mission in this world.

As Vincentians and reflecting on these anniversaries of our saints, our hope in the year before us is in competency and mission. We need to work with diocesan priests and lay ministers who are willing to be *competent, compassionate, courageous and committed ministers*. That is to say, we need more ministers who are willing to be active within the programs and ministries of the local churches.

In our Ethiopian situation the range of hopes that cry out for mission is enormous. Regrettably, many of our churches grow in despair, because of other denominations taking away the faithful from them and the rapid growth and expansion of Moslems surrounding them, better than they are being nurtured with hope and strengthening their faith.

We need more local churches that are willing to be churches of the Good Shepherd. In the biblical narrative, Jesus refers to the Good Shepherd as the one who — with ninety-nine sheep in the fold — went out into the rough, rocky places to seek out that one sheep that was lost. Our dilemma — indeed, our opportunity and our being involved in popular mission — is that with fifty sheep in the fold, there are fifty who are lost in the rough and to help them with the hope of reviving their faith.

In our strategic long-range popular mission planning for our local churches, we thought four steps are important for effective, successful mission to take place during the times we start to implement the popular mission ministry and for many more years to come. During this period of time what we intend to do with the lay ministers and diocesan priests is

- Develop a realistic assessment of its present standing and size in relation to other churches

- Make fundamental decisions as to the primary direction for its future
- Study its strengths in relation to the central characteristics of effective, successful churches
- Decide those strategic objectives that will advance its long-range effectiveness in mission.

By following these steps, it will be possible to help our lay ministers and diocesan priests to develop thoughtful decisions that build on the parish's central strength and enable it to be decisively missionary in its community.

When we say long-range planning, at the end of one year of popular mission, it is to hand over the responsibility to the lay ministers and diocesan priests to lead the parish through these four key steps. At a certain interval of time both the diocesan priests and lay ministers would do well to organize their own recommendations into three groups: present initial strengths; the core strengths to be expanded; and foundational strengths to be added in the future. That is to say, effective, successful mission must build on those foundational strengths that are well in place, those that will be expanded, and those that are to be added in the coming two to five years.

In general our involvement in popular missions is to be able to deliver effective mission outreach, and equip lay ministers and diocesan priests with necessary knowledge and skill.

## **Mozambique**

### **Mission in Parishes**

In 1975, after the independence of Mozambique, the greater number of the foreign missionaries returned to their native countries, leaving many missions abandoned. For many years several mission-parishes were attended by one missionary or a lay person and this situation continued until 1994 when a peace agreement was signed. From that time the number of foreign missionaries and native clergy has increased. Nevertheless we are far from resolving the missionary problem. The Vice Province of Mozambique ministers in eight mission-parishes in an area with many Christian communities. Great distances separate these communities and this impedes on-going and effective evangelization action. It is clear that we need to unite our efforts and define common criteria in a Vincentian process of evangelization so that Vincentian missionaries, lay members of the mission and members of the Vincentian Family



can come together in order to awaken the missionary spirit and strengthen the evangelization process.

In the main parishes there is better pastoral care and a more constant evangelizing action. Nevertheless in several or many Christian communities that are cared for, the structures for communion and participation in a ministerial Church are not adequate. It is sad to see that in these Christian communities there is no catechesis and even less, no on-going process of evangelization. How will we have catechists to teach Christian doctrine or how will we have evangelizers if we do not have people who proclaim the Word of God? We need missionaries, missionaries dedicated to their vocation and we also need lay missionaries. We need to inculcate the missionary spirit among the laity in the mission-parishes that we care for, as well as among the members of the Vincentian Family, so that all, with a renewed missionary spirit, might engage in a new evangelization.

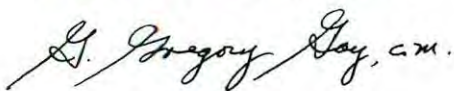
In this regard the popular missions are an effective instrument to inspire laity and consecrated women and men with the missionary spirit.

To promote the popular missions is to promote the missionary spirit and thus multiply the number of people who proclaim the Word of God. Promoting the popular missions also cultivates participation and communion among the members of the Christian community and enables us to join together our efforts and ideas in a common work of evangelization.

The objective is to awaken the missionary spirit and strengthen the unity of the pastoral ministry through giving popular missions in the mission-parishes that are cared for by the Vice Province of Mozambique. This will enable us to change Christian communities into ministerial communities.

I pray that, through the intercession of St. Justin de Jacobis, God may give us the grace to continue to deepen our missionary spirit in the world where we are called to evangelize especially the most abandoned.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.", with a stylized, cursive script.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General



TEMPO FORTE CIRCULAR  
(2-9 October 2010)

Rome, 20 October 2010

*To the Members of the Congregation of the Mission*

My dear brothers of the Congregation of the Mission,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

This will be the first circular of the new administration having celebrated its first *tempo forte* from 2-9 October.

We began our meeting as usual with an **ongoing formation session** wherein we had a lively exchange over the two documents of the General Assembly: synthesis and lines of action. This session was held for all the members of the Curia. The Council itself will continue further study of the synthesis and lines of action as part of the *tempo forte* sessions in order to reflect on how both documents can become more effective instruments in the life of the members of the Congregation of the Mission.

The Saturday before the *tempo forte*, the Superior General held an **orientation for the new members of the Council**. At the orientation were members of SIEV. The coordinator, Alexander Jernej, gave a presentation, joined by the input of other members. The session was followed by the Director of CIF, Father Marcelo Manimtim, explaining to the new Council members the objectives and goals of CIF as an office for ongoing formation at the international level. This was followed by a session given by the delegate for the Vincentian Family, Father Manuel Ginete, depicting how his role as the delegate might be carried out by the different members of the new Council. The final session was given by the Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office, Father Miles Heinen.

During the week we had special presentations: a dialog with the Bishop of El Alto, Bolivia, Msgr. Jesús Juárez Párraga; a report given by the Econome General, Father John Gouldrick; and a report on the department of Communications given by Father Julio Suescun.

1. The first matter of business was the nominating of the **new Director General** of the Daughters of Charity. That name is to be announced at a future date.
2. Then we discussed the General Assembly of 2010 in a number of different ways. First, we had an **evaluation of the General Assembly** wherein the following **recommendations** will be made in preparation for the General Assembly 2016.
  - More time will be dedicated to moments of prayer.
  - More time will be given to work in groups.
  - There will be a greater clarification of the role of the synthesizers.
  - The Directory will be redacted in order to be more clearly understood.
  - We will solicit the provinces and the local communities to work at a more intense preparation for the General Assembly, helping them to see it as an integral part of the General Assembly.
  - Time will be reserved at the beginning of the General Assembly to give an orientation, especially to the new participants.
  - A moment of interchange between the Superior General, his Council and the Assembly participants will be held.
3. The **revised Statutes: a Commission** composed of Father Alberto Vernaschi, coordinator, Javier Álvarez and Nicola Albanesi was formed.
4. We treated the **postulata that were recommended to the attention of the Superior General and his council**.
  - The first postulate dealing with an on-line catalog: the Secretary General will solicit information from various religious congregations that already have catalogs on line and will present that at a later ordinary council meeting.
  - The second postulate dealing with a Practical Guide for Parishes: the Assistants Eli Chaves and Stanislav Zontak will begin that process by preparing a questionnaire to be presented to the Visitors and their councils.
  - The third postulate dealing with the renovation of the *Ratio Formationis* of the Congregation: the Visitors will be asked to send their formation projects to the Curia.
5. We dealt with matters related to the General Curia and the assignments of the **General Assistants** to the provinces that they will visit and other **responsibilities**. The Assistants will be writing letters to the Visitors of the respective provinces.



The Secretary General will compile a list of when the last canonical visits were made. The method used for the canonical visits will be studied at the beginning of each *tempo forte* in order that we might improve the responsibility of being animators of the spirit of the Congregation.

Regarding the different roles that each Assistant will carry out:

- **Father Javier Álvarez**, Vicar General, will be responsible for confreres in difficulty. He will also be a member of the editorial commission of Vincentiana and be delegate of the Curia for SIEV, that is International Secretariat for Vincentian Studies.
  - **Father Stanislav Zontak** will be responsible for initial and ongoing formation. He will therefore be the representative for the Curia with the CIF program in Paris and with the Vincentian priest students in Rome. Part of that responsibility deals with looking for scholarships for those studying.
  - **Father Eli Chaves** will be responsible for the Vincentian Family. Particularly he will be the moderator of MISEVI International. He will assist the Superior General with regard to the international mission in El Alto and Cochabamba, Bolivia.
  - **Father Varghese Thottamkara** will be the Assistant for Missions, particularly responsible for the international missions of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. He will collaborate with the Econome General in the work of the Mission Distribution Fund.
  - **Father Zeracristos Yosief** will be the council representative on the Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation of the Union of Superiors General. He will also be the link with the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change as well as our contact with the United Nations Representative, Father Joseph Foley.
  - With regard to the **Conferences of Visitors and/or Provinces** the Superior General will be the council representative for the National Visitors Conference of the United States; Javier Alvarez and Stanislav Zontak for CEVIM; Varghese Thottamkara for APVC; Zeracristos for COVIAM; and Eli Chaves for CLAPVI.
  - Different Assistants will participate over the course of the next two years in workshops for the formation of General Councils. Each of the Assistants will take some time this year and next to improve their knowledge of different languages.
6. We received and studied at length, with the help of a report from Father Suescun, **SIEV**. In our *tempo forte* meeting of December we will reflect on possible candidates to assume the responsibility

of the Executive Secretary of SIEV. At the same time we will study the possibility that the confrere also be the new Director of Vincentiana, Nuntia and the web pages of the Vincentian Family and Congregation of the Mission ([famvin.org](http://famvin.org) and [cmglobal.org](http://cmglobal.org)). We also concretized two projects of SIEV; one will be a workshop regarding Islam. A preparatory commission is being formed. Father Claudio Santangelo will be the coordinator. He will be contacting a number of confreres in order to determine their availability and then plan the first meeting. The other project of SIEV is the ongoing formation of Vincentian researchers. Both the workshop on Islam and the researchers meeting will be planned for sometime during 2011.

7. The **Procurator General**: the Superior General and his Council have appointed Father Alberto Vernaschi. He has graciously accepted. We suspended the statute that dictates that he loses his status in his province; therefore he remains a member of the Province of Rome. Father Vernaschi will work in close collaboration with Father Javier Álvarez.
8. **Secretary General**: Giuseppe Turati was nominated and has accepted. He will begin full-time at the end of January.
9. Father John Gouldrick, the **Econome General**, has also asked that we do a search for a new Econome General. Once that responsibility is filled, we will also have an assistant to the Econome General from the Congregation of the Mission in order to respond to the increasing workload that this office experiences.
10. We studied a report from the **Commission for Promoting Systemic Change** and have made the request that Father Maloney, as coordinator, be present at our *tempo forte* meeting in December to help orient the Council regarding the purpose of this Commission, and particularly the project that is connected with it, Zafen, the Vincentian Family project in Haiti.
11. The next item was a **VSO report** from the director, Father Miles Heinen who continued the orientation that he had begun previously with the new Council, explaining more in detail how the report works and the responsibility that the director has *vis a vis* the General Council.
12. We had the **report from the Econome General** wherein he presented a new process for determining the overall costs of each province for the General Assembly. We approved the method, considering it to be more just and balanced in terms of the amounts paid by those provinces who have better economic



possibilities as well as the provinces that are less financially able. A similar procedure will be presented at our next *tempo forte* regarding the provincial tax.

Of particular importance, we want to mention our gratitude to the Province of Paris for the low costs that they charged during our stay in the Maison Mère of the rue de Sèvres. Also noteworthy is that **the Daughters of Charity did not charge us anything for our use of the rooms that we had available to us** in the rue du Bac. I ask that all of us in a special way show our gratitude to the Daughters of Charity through our prayers for them and our support to the different provinces throughout the world.

Father Gouldrick also presented the economic report of the activities of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The event is considered closed with the reimbursement of monies to both the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission who established the fund.

13. We reviewed the report from Father John Freund of the **famvin webpage** wherein he highlighted how the lines of action from the General Assembly in a number of different ways call for the implementation and use of technology that is available today.
14. We reviewed information that we received from the different **Conferences of Visitors and/or Provinces**. Of particular interest is the report from COVIAM wherein we reviewed the process for the establishment of the mission in Chad which is planned for Easter of 2011.
15. The **International mission** of the Congregation in **El Alto** presently has three confreres: Aidan Rooney, Diego Plá and Cyrille de Nanteuil. Father Diego Plá's contract with the international mission was renewed for another three-year period. We reviewed the contract between the Congregation of the Mission and the diocese of El Alto, approving it with minor modifications.  
The former superior of the mission of El Alto, Father Aníbal Vera has finished his experience of ten years of service. We thank Father Aníbal for the most generous service and enthusiastic missionary spirit that he exercised during his time in El Alto. We are also delighted to know that the province of Peru will replace Father Aníbal with another confrere, guaranteeing their presence in the mission until 2016.
16. The Archbishop of **Cochabamba**, Msgr. Tito Solari, gave us an update on the eventual assuming of a parish in his diocese, as well as the future construction of a residence for the

missionaries. In that mission at present are Father David Paniagua and Father Joel Vásquez, the former having been the previous Director of the Daughters of Charity in Bolivia and the latter, the current Director. Both will be part of this community along with a third missionary whose name will be mentioned at a later point in this circular.

17. Our mission in **Papua New Guinea**. We approved the community project presented by Homero Marin, Justin Eke and Włodzimierz Małota. Then we reviewed and renewed contracts with both the Holy Spirit Seminary, Bomana and Holy Name of Jesus Parish.
18. The international mission of **Solomon Islands**: We renewed Greg Walsh as superior of the mission. At present there are five missionaries in the Solomon Islands, the superior Greg Walsh, Ivica Gregurec, Victor Bieler, Flaviano Caintic and Augustinus Marsup. They are awaiting the arrival of three confreres. Their names will be mentioned later in this report
19. We reviewed letters from a number of **bishops who have asked for missionaries**; two are from Angola, the diocese of Sumbe and the diocese of Malanje. The decision was to include both of these petitions in the October Mission Appeal as well as writing specific letters to particular provinces who may be able to respond to these requests. We also studied a letter from the bishop of Kaolack in Senegal. This request will also be included in the Mission Appeal of October. The Superior General will write to another province who may be interested in opening a special mission there.

We studied a request from the Visitor of Puerto Rico regarding the Region of Haiti. A decision was to also include this Region in the Mission Appeal of October.

20. With regard to **candidates to the missions**, we are hoping to have a confrere in place in Haiti to help support projects of the Vincentian Family, part of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary commitment. With regard to the mission of the Solomon Islands, we have named a confrere from Eritrea, Father Teclemicael Tewolde, who will participate in the community working in the seminary, in Scripture. There is a confrere from Argentina, Raúl Castro, who is in Australia preparing for the mission in Solomon Islands, as well as a third confrere from Indonesia who will be named at a later date. The confrere from Nigeria to be assigned to the mission in Papua New Guinea is Father Jude Okechukwa along with Georges Maylaa from the Province of the Orient, Emmanuel

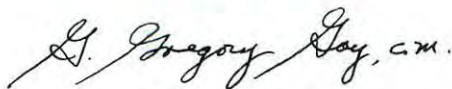


La Paz and a layman Marlon Padillo both from the Philippines. We named the third missionary for the new mission in Cochabamba who is Father Jorge Manrique Castro from the province of Chile.

I conclude this circular of our *tempo forte* meeting with the words from the homily of Cardinal Rodé on the occasion of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise de Marillac in St. Peter's Basilica, September 25, 2010. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has sent me to bring good news to the poor.' These words of the Lord place us at the very heart of our celebration. These words resounded time and time again from the soul and the lips of Saint Vincent de Paul. These same words resound, indeed ought to resound, from the lips and the heart of every Vincentian who follows Vincent's path."

Article 2 of our Constitutions asks us to remain in a continual state of renewal, faithful to the gospel, attentive to the signs of the times, opening up new ways and using new means adapted to the circumstance of the time and place. Cardinal Rodé goes on to say, "This state of renewal ought to be above all else a work of the Spirit. May it be in the spirit of Jesus who makes us new creatures that we provide concrete and durable responses to the urgent demands of our time."

Your brother in Saint Vincent,



G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General



## MISSION APPEAL LETTER

Rome, 24 October 2010

*To all the Members of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Confreres,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

Once again, my brothers, we are in the month of October, the month dedicated to missions and our traditional appeal letter. I would like you, each and every missionary who reads this letter, to reflect on the statements from two of the documents that came out of our General Assembly: the Synthesis and our Lines of Action. These comments come from the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, the maximum authority who helps us to live faithfully the charism that Saint Vincent de Paul has entrusted to us.

I begin by quoting from the synthesis, under the section *The Lord Calls Us in the Cry of the Poor*. As is stated, "Moved by love we will go where the poor call us, even where others have not dared to go, and find ever creative ways of meeting their needs." Under the section *Responding in Greater Creativity to Mission and Charity* it says, "A more effective service of the poor wherever they are found, demands that we strengthen the collaboration in the worldwide Congregation." This is expressed in several ways: "Through collaboration in *missions ad gentes* and in initiatives within the provinces or conference that benefit the whole Congregation, for example exchange of personnel..."

In our Lines of Action entitled *Creative Fidelity to the Mission*, the General Assembly recognizes "its responsibility for a great heritage from Saint Vincent and the first missionaries up to our day." We are called to be "docile to the Holy Spirit who wishes to make more dynamic our fidelity in creativity to the mission. And we are called to reinvigorate the charism attentive to the signs of the times."

Under #4 in the Lines of Action, we speak of *creativity in our ministries*. Let me highlight four goals presented to the whole of the Congregation by the General Assembly.

- To review our ministries and the structures of our community life to enhance their missionary dimension

- To foster personal availability and mobility to participate in new and challenging missionary projects
- To undertake new works of evangelization in the area of new emerging cultures, ecumenical and religious dialog
- To go to the most distant *missiones ad gentes*...

Having reflected on this call from the maximum authority of the Congregation of the Mission I present to you updates and petitions from different missionary places whether they are international missions, requests from Bishops or requests from individual provinces.

### INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

1. We have been blessed with four new volunteers for the international mission of **Papua New Guinea**: a confrere and a layman from the Philippines, a confrere from Nigeria and a confrere from the Province of the Orient. These missionaries will be serving in the Holy Spirit Seminary as well as in the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, both in the diocese of Port Moresby and another in the parish of Our Lady of Fatima in Woitape.

I received a letter from Bishop Rochus Josef Tatama, of **Bereina** stating the following: "I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to you and your congregation for responding positively to our request, thus committing Fr. Włodzimierz Małota to be in our presence. I would like to express from the outset my deepest joy and gratitude for him as a person, a priest and religious from your community. There is new life and great hope for his ministry and passion for the salvation of souls and the people are responding positively with greater commitment and dedication. But I currently have four vacant parishes in the mountains without any resident priest. This region is very rugged and mountainous and thus the people are isolated with little or no basic social services. In my pastoral visits I walk for nine, sometimes fourteen hours to get to the nearest parish station. All in all, this part of my diocese is very challenging and very strengthening spiritually. I would officially like to propose this region to your Congregation and would happily welcome your confreres to come and join us. My view is there are four parishes where four to five confreres can live together in community and do the pastoral visits within the boundaries. I would like to see the Vincentians take more responsibility for this area and concentrate a well-coordinated pastoral program for the well being of this population. I believe a specific area as



such with the contribution of missionaries from different provinces of your congregation will contribute to the mountain people in a very great way."

Also from Papua New Guinea, I have a request from Bishop Gilles from **Kiunga**. He states, "I come to follow up on my previous petitions presented some years ago after my visit to your Generalate. Since no response was given, my two petitions remain the same: one priest to be a companion to my priests and one priest to care for the formation house where we want to prepare candidates for seminary life. I am aware that your needs and requests are many, but the only way to obtain priests is to keep asking for priests. Please do not forget us." The language in the mission of Papua New Guinea is English and pidgin English.

2. We are happy to report that there are three confreres awaiting visas to join the five confreres already present in the international mission in the **Solomon Islands**. They will be joined by a confrere from Argentina, a confrere from Eritrea and a confrere from Indonesia, bringing the total to eight confreres, which meets the basic number that the mission has asked for; but the confreres in the mission wish to expand. New possibilities such as a parish in nearby Auki diocese. The Bishop is a religious, a Dominican; his parents were trained by the Vincentians. He welcomes us to his diocese. Recently the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of Zagreb have made a commitment, following upon the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deaths of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, to open a new mission. Four Sisters are currently being prepared to go to the diocese of Auki. Cannot we, as Vincentians, assist them and the rest of the diocese in being bearers of good news for our lords and masters, the poor? The language is English and pidgin English.
3. In the third international mission, in **Bolivia**, presently there are three confreres in **El Alto**, one from the Eastern Province of the United States, one from the Province of Madrid whose contract was recently renewed for another three years, and one from the province of Paris. They are awaiting a new member to arrive from the Province of Peru. The mission in El Alto is one of our most difficult missions because of the territory, the language and the culture. The bishop was recently in Rome and visited our General Curia. He is most grateful for the presence of the Vincentians and he desires us to expand our presence there, particularly in giving support not only to these abandoned mission parishes but also to accompany his seminarians in formation.

Our new mission in **Cochabamba** has two members who are preparing to take over a new parish: one from the Province of Colombia, who is also the Director of the Daughters of Charity, and the other from the Province of **Chile**, a Bolivian, the former Director of the Daughters of Charity. Shortly they will be joined by a third confrere, a Bolivian from the Province of Chile. This new mission is being solidified and they will not only serve the needs of the people of the area, but support the Vincentian Family who have called us to be one with them. The language is Spanish and the native language of the people.

### NEW MISSIONS

4. I share now new invitations that have been made, as well as renewing some previous invitations that have yet to be responded to. Last year I received a letter from a **Bishop** in Angola. He says the following: "I was recently named **bishop** of the **Diocese of Mbanza Congo, Angola**. Visiting the **diocese** I was struck by the lack of diocesan clergy and missionaries as well. The diocese is situated in the northern part of Angola, an area of 39,459 km<sup>2</sup>." Because the population is large and the pastoral agents are few, he says, "I confidently and humbly write looking to your congregation with the possibility of opening a presence in our diocese, having as the principal reasons, the evangelization *ad gentes* and/or the direction of our minor **seminary**." That request came last year, and still is waiting for someone to respond. Since then, I have received petitions from two other **bishops** in Angola whose requests I share with you.
5. The **bishop** of the **Diocese of Sumbe, Angola** writes, "...60,000 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of close to two million inhabitants. We have 35 priests and 50 religious. The charism of your Congregation has a place very appropriate in our diocese. In fact, you can also find there the Daughters of Charity and other members of the Vincentian Family." In my visit to Angola at the end of last year, a young member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul said to me, "Father we have all the branches of the Vincentian Family present in Angola, except for one, the Congregation of the Mission. We need you. We want you." The **bishop** of Sumbe wrote me again recently saying, "I am very grateful for the renewed hope that one day the Congregation of the Mission will come and work in my diocese. Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, the patron of the diocese, will help us to achieve this most urgent need." In an interview that I had with the **Bishop**,



together with the Daughters of Charity in Angola, I noticed that his Bishop's ring is the Miraculous Medal, to whom he has great devotion. Might it be a sign that the Lord is calling us to work there to support the Vincentian Family, particularly the Daughters of Charity? I bring that to you for your reflection.

6. The Bishop from the **Diocese of Malanje, Angola**, recently wrote, "Passing through Madrid I spoke with the Visitatrix of the Province of St. Vincent asking what I should do in order to request missionaries from the Congregation of the Mission. She indicated that I should speak with the Superior General." He says that he needs the presence of missionaries both for mission parishes and for educational promotion. The Daughters of Charity would like very much to have the presence of the missionaries of St. Vincent de Paul to accompany them spiritually. The language in Angola is Portuguese.
7. During our General Assembly I received an e-mail from the bishop of **Kaolack in Senegal**. He says, "it is my desire to reinforce the missionary presence in the Diocese of Kaolack." He was told by some religious missionaries of the existence of the Congregation of the Mission, called Vincentians, who have missionaries in Africa, mentioning Ethiopia and Tanzania. He says "it is for that reason, with much confidence that I solicit the presence of your Congregation for the works of evangelization in the Diocese of Kaolack." The language is French.
8. I have received an invitation from the **Bishop of Tunis** where currently one of our confreres from the Province of Toulouse is carrying out a missionary experience. The Bishop knows well our heritage. His cathedral is named after Saint Vincent de Paul and in the parish that he wishes to offer to the Congregation of the Mission, there is a painting of Saint Vincent when he was held in captivity. The bishop is requesting two missionaries, one priest and one brother, or two priests. The one missionary would dedicate his time to the activities of the parish in addition to a ministry to the prison and chaplaincy to the Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of Charity of Mother Teresa. The other missionary, priest or brother, could teach in one of the schools in Tunis, English or any other subject that he would be qualified for, and/or work in Caritas as well as in the Archives of the diocese. He would hope that one of the missionaries be young enough to carry out full-time ministry. The other missionary could be older in age, with possibilities of less mobility yet energetic to do pastoral ministry. Interestingly enough, the main language is English. He says that the majority of those who

participate in the Eucharist on the weekends are of African descent, many being from Nigeria, and a small but active group of Filipinos. The Bishop is very enthusiastic and would be delighted if he had confreres from the Congregation of the Mission. He particularly mentioned the possibility of the confreres coming from either Nigeria or another English-speaking country in Africa and/or the Philippines. The Daughters of Charity are present in Tunis, as well as other parts of Northern Africa. Confreres could be of assistance to them as well.

### PROVINCIAL MISSIONS

9. I would like to move on to the provincial missions where Visitors have asked for support from missionaries from around the world. I begin with the **Region of Haiti**. Recently the Visitor wrote to me saying he wanted to give the opportunity to some of our Haitian confreres to study outside of Haiti, thus the need for other missionaries to be present in Haiti, to integrate into the community life of those present in the Region. The possibilities of work in Haiti at this time are unlimited, accompanying the Vincentian Family as well as the Daughters of Charity in many of the different projects of reconstruction after the terrible destruction caused by the earthquake. The language is French or Creole.
10. As always I make an appeal for confreres to respond to the needs of our mission in the **Province of Cuba**. One of the bishops there wrote to me saying that there has been a lack of clergy since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, in most cases, the Cuban countryside and many small areas lack a proper spiritual attention. He states that the presence of the Church, even in the cities as well as in the countryside, is truly poor, especially in the region of the east. Recently a confrere from the Province of Colombia has joined the Province of Cuba. Last year, as I had reported, a confrere from Spain, coming from Madagascar, entered the mission. The needs are great as well as are the challenges that Cuba presents. The language is Spanish.
11. Once again, I extend a petition for missionaries in the mission parish of **Santiago Apóstol, Amubri, Talamanca, Costa Rica**. The request was made last year and unfortunately there were no responses. The parish is a mountainous area, inhabited by 10,000 indigenous Bribris and 3,000 Cabécares. The region has 33 communities. The parish center is in Amubri. In order to get



there you must cross the river by boat and then go 8 km to the parish center. The parish relies heavily on lay pastoral agents in different communities. Their leadership, and therefore their formation, is fundamental. The Vice-Province of Costa Rica makes a call to the Congregation throughout the world for a few good missionaries who want to share this way of faith with the indigenous of Talamanca so that these our brothers and sisters may also enjoy the privilege of knowing deeply God's love for them. The language is Spanish and also the language of the local people.

12. In **Honduras**, the Province of Barcelona continually requests assistance in their mission in Honduras. It involves a great deal of work with lay missionaries and pastoral team ministry. The language is Spanish and Moskitia.
13. Our **Province of China** also makes an appeal to the international Congregation of the Mission. I wish to request specifically for confreres to go to mainland China. Special efforts are being made so that the Asia Pacific Visitors Conference can coordinate a better preparation for evangelization, something that many religious congregations throughout the world have been doing for a number of years now.
14. Another regular request is from the **Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius**. As I wrote previously, it is an area that is challenging yet promising for evangelizers. The Vice-Province is nurturing vocations from the Ukraine as well as Belorussia yet not fast enough to be able to respond to the various needs the Vice-Province has at this time. I make an appeal for young men in the Congregation of the Mission who are willing to make a sacrifice to serve in an area of the world that clambers to know God's love in the Catholic faith. I am pleased with the efforts that the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius is making in collaborating with the Vincentian Family in a number of projects of evangelization and service of the most abandoned. The common language of the confreres in the Province is Russian.
15. Another missionary Vice-Province that is always in need of assistance is **Mozambique**. It has confreres from Portugal as well as from Brazil, Mexico and a number of countries in Africa such as Nigeria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Congo. The language in this very international Vice-Province is Portuguese and the language of the people. The Province of Salamanca and the Vice-Province of Mozambique are negotiating in order that the mission of Nacala become a part of the Vice-Province. This is a good



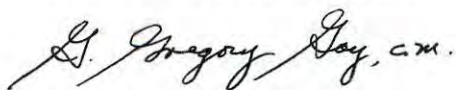
experience of interprovincial collaboration and expansion. At the same time, even though personnel resources are low, the confreres in Mozambique have opened yet another mission. Presently they are awaiting the arrival of a volunteer who comes from El Salvador, a diocesan priest who is willing to serve in this mission territory of the Congregation of the Mission.

16. We have need of a missionary in **Hungary**, a province that has only nine confreres. The province is involved in three principal activities: pastoral ministry at the Catholic University of Piliscsaba (Budapest) and at the school in Szob; accompanying the Daughters of Charity in Hungary and Romania; and a new service that the Province wants to begin this year: a new team for the popular missions. The language used is Hungarian.

I want to conclude with the very prayer that Saint Vincent himself expressed, asking for good missionaries.

*"Lord, send your Church good workers, but they should be really good ones. Send good missionaries, men such as they should be, to work hard in Your vineyard; persons, my God, truly detached from themselves, their own ease, and worldly goods. They can be a smaller number, provided they are good. Grant Your Church this grace, Lord" (XI, 312-322).*

Your brother in Saint Vincent,



G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

## INFORMATION AND CRITERIA FOR THOSE WHO WRITE

1. After a period of serious discernment, if you should feel moved to volunteer, please send your letter or e-mail to Rome no later than 27 November 2010 or again by February 27, 2011 so that we might review the requests in our *tempo forte* meetings of December and March.
2. It is, of course, helpful to know the language beforehand, but it is not absolutely necessary. A period of cultural and language training will be provided for the missionaries.

3. While we have decided that no automatic age cutoff would be established, it is surely necessary that the missionary have reasonably good health and the flexibility needed for inculturation.
4. Confreres who volunteer should inform the Visitor that they have done so. I will also dialogue with the Visitor about the matter.
5. Your letter should give some background about your person, your ministerial experience, your languages, and your training. It should also express any particular interests that you have, such as the mission in which you would like to take part.
6. Even if you have already written in the past, please contact me again. Experience has demonstrated that confreres who are not available at one moment might be available at another.
7. **If you cannot go to the missions, perhaps your monetary contribution can represent your zeal for the mission. Every year about 15 eligible provinces needing help to realize their mission, seek a micro-project grant of \$ 5,000 or less from the Vincentian Solidarity fund. These grants can be awarded by the VSO (through the Curia) quickly and with minimal paperwork. The VSO reports on the wonderful fruits of these grants in its quarterly bulletin (available at [www.famvian.org/vso](http://www.famvian.org/vso)). The well for the micro-project grants is going dry. Donations to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund are the only source of funding for these micro-project grants.**

### **VINCENTIAN SOLIDARITY FUND: TO MAKE A CONTRIBUITION**

#### **Provincial, House and Individual Contributions:**

1. Checks made payable to: "Congregazione della Missione" and with "Deposit Only" written on the back. These should be sent to:

Treasurer General  
Via dei Capasso, 30  
00164 Roma Italy

2. Other possibilities for bank transfers can be discussed with the Treasurer General.

#### **In every case:**

3. All gifts received will be acknowledged. (If your contribution is not acknowledged in a reasonable time, please contact us for clarification.)
4. Please inform us if you are making any transfer of money, as described above.



## RECENT OFFICIAL APPOINTMENTS TO THE GENERAL CURIA

Rome, 9 November 2010

### *To the Members of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear confreres,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

I would like to give you some background information about three recent appointments of Curia officials.

Father **Joseph Geders**, the new **Econome General** of the Congregation of the Mission, has accepted this responsibility with a spirit of faith and generosity. He is from the Western Province in the United States. Born on August 3, 1956 he entered the Congregation of the Mission on April 15, 1978 in Perryville, Missouri and was ordained a Priest of the Mission on September 27, 1984 at St. Louis Missouri. He was Dean of Formation at St. Louis Preparatory Seminary after having chaired the Theology Department there. In addition to a Master of Divinity with a specialization in Liturgical Studies, Father Geders has completed programs in Management, Finance and Legal Issues.

Father served as Provincial and Regional Treasurer of the Midwest Province. He was Director of the Center for Development in Ministry, administering education programs in ongoing formation for ministers and Director of the Development of Evangelization, Catechesis and Worship, both in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Currently he is pastor of Our Lady of the Mountains, a parish of 800 families in Jackson, Wyoming, and of Holy Family Parish in Afton, Wyoming with 150 families.

Father Geders' background and experience in finance prepare him well for his new position as Econome General. We assure him of our prayers and support in his new role. He will arrive in Rome in January to begin a transitional program.

Father **Giuseppe Turati**, the new **Secretary General** of the Congregation of the Mission, was born at **Como**, December 7, 1955, and entered the Congregation of the Mission September 9, 1974. He was ordained a priest on April 12, 1980.

Father Turati has degrees in Theology and Sociology and has used his education as a teacher of Moral Theology, Sociology and Methods of Social Work and Professional Ethics.

He has been a Spiritual Advisor to a therapeutic community for drug addicts in Milan and eventually became its director, then President of the Association of this facility which included two other units of service.

For many years he has worked with Vincentian Volunteers, serving as the regional assistant for the Region of Lombardy, while also coordinating the Center of Vincentian Culture of Lombardy and serving as spiritual counsellor for the Youth Sector of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Father Turati is also the webmaster for the Italian page of the Vincentian Family website. Father has had two terms, in 1990 and again in 2009 as Provincial Councillor and has served as Secretary of CEVIM.

Besides his native Italian, Father Turati also speaks French, Spanish, English and German.

Father Turati will assume the office at the end of January 2011.

Father **Alberto Vernaschi** is the new **Procurator General** of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity. Father Alberto Vernaschi was born January 7, 1939 at Rustigazzo di Lugagnano Val d'Arda (Piacenza). He entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1957, completed his studies in philosophy and theology at Collegio Alberoni in Piacenza and was ordained a priest in Piacenza March 19, 1963.

He studied Canon Law at the Gregorian Pontifical University from October 1963 to June 1966 and earned a Licentiate in Canon Law, 1965, and doctorate in Canon Law, 1967.

His ministries at the service of the Congregation of the Mission include teaching Canon Law at Collegio Alberoni, Visitor of the Province of Rome, regional assistant of the Vincentian Volunteers of Tuscany, director of the Daughters of Charity of the Province of Siena and of Rome, and superior of houses in Piacenza, Florence and Siena. Currently Father is superior of the Leoniano in Rome and Provincial Econome.

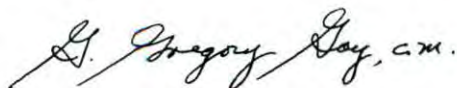
Other ministries include serving as Episcopal Vicar for consecrated life of the Diocese of Piacenza and as Pontifical Commissioner

for the monastic family "Fraternità di Gesù" of the Monastery of Vallechiara di Lanuvio (Rome) 2008.

Father Vernaschi has already assumed his role. He will remain a member of the Province of Rome and continue residing at the Leoniano.

Let us accompany our confreres with our support and prayers as they begin their new services for the Congregation.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General



## ADVENT LETTER 2010

Advent 2010

### *To all the Members of the Vincentian Family*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

*"In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet on to the road to peace" (Luke 1:78-79).*

The images of darkness and light, night and day, despair and hope, death and life, hell and heaven are images that often come to mind in our reflection and prayer during the time of Advent that we are privileged to begin again. These contrasting images are ever present and surround us in the world in which we live. The prophet Habakkuk cries out at one point, *"Why do you let me see ruin: Why must I look at misery? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife and clamorous discord"* (Hb. 1:3). As I heard that text proclaimed some weeks ago in the Sunday Eucharist, it struck me that still today we are surrounded by the same violence and destruction, whether because of natural causes or human causes.

There is destruction of so much human life because of natural disasters. I think of the recent outbreak of cholera in Haiti; hundreds of people died of it after having survived the earthquake. They continue to suffer; they continue to pass through what literally we may call hell. In Pakistan, hundreds of thousands of people vanished recently in the typhoons that have hit the Asian areas; how many people have lost their lives, their health, their homes? Human causes include border violence that is experienced between Mexico and the United States, where since 2006 more than 30,000 people have been assassinated because of drug conflicts. So much violence before our eyes. Advent is a time to turn that darkness to light, that experience of hell to heaven, the despair to the hope that a decent life can be a reasonable goal.

I entitle my reflection this year, *Christmas: A Story of Living Without Frontiers*. As we read through the various Scripture passages that the Church presents for our reflection during this time of Advent, we encounter the theme of a God who is for all, a God of all nations.

In one sense it is ironic because Jesus, when He was born into this world, was born into a corner, a place where no one would live, a shelter for animals. And yet the contrast is that, even though being put into this limited place for survival, He has become for us, the God of life for all, a God who knows no boundaries, a God who came among us breaking down barriers that did not allow people to draw close to each other, whether they come from another nation, such as the barrier between the Samaritans and the Jews or because they were well-to-do and educated, never wanting to mingle with those who were considered outcasts of society; breaking down that barrier of the so-called unwanted people: lepers, beggars, blind, crippled.

In His birth into poverty Jesus, by his word and deed, filled people's lives with richness, peace, goodness, health, reconciliation and healing, leading them from darkness into light, from despair into hope, from death into new life. This past August I had the opportunity to visit Project Juan Diego, an apostolate of the Daughters of Charity on the US-Mexican border. It spoke to me of the gift of new life, the opportunity to be truly born that we receive at Christmas. The Daughters of Charity have trained a staff of lay people and volunteers and have become a dynamic community. They reach out to those who have lived in darkness, those who have known the depths of despair, giving them light and hope for new life. I experienced that personally when I visited some of the people whose lives have been touched by Project Juan Diego. They are people touched by the volunteers, the staff and the Sisters who have entered into their lives and given them the opportunity to live a new life.

I heard that from the witness of a man of my age who had literally closed himself off from the world, living only in the confines of his small room, unwilling even to step out to his yard to relate to others who might be passing by. After a gradual gentle yet firm process of accompaniment and presence, this gentleman came to discover his true self. Given the opportunity to live for the first time in his life, he now lives with the enthusiasm and desire to go out from the confines of his own home to meet with others and to encourage them to live a new kind of life that he himself discovered. The witness of this one gentleman is just one of many stories of people who have been given new life once they were able to pass beyond the limits that they had imposed on themselves. They have come to recognize the gift of life that God is for each and everyone. This gift has been deposited in us and is part and parcel of what Christmas is about: the gift of God Himself, the Incarnate Jesus entering into our lives, helping us to discover our own giftedness and encouraging and moving us beyond ourselves in order to give that gift, helping others discover it in themselves.



Not very far from this neighborhood where the Daughters of Charity have been a sign of new life and have shared that life with others, there is another group of Daughters of Charity who also give life, but in a very different way. You might say that they live in an experience of hell. This community of Daughters of Charity lives just the other side of the border in a town that is ravaged by violence and destruction because of drugs, poverty, greed, and ignorance. The Sisters crossed the frontier and joined with the Daughters of Charity of Project Juan Diego as we celebrated together the Eucharist which is the culmination of our life, the source of our strength and the very experience of God's gift of Himself among us.

In talking with the Sisters from the Mexican side, and listening to the stories of horror and suffering on a daily basis that they recounted, in the midst of suffering and violence that they experience, I was struck by the contrast of the presence of the Sisters on one side of the frontier as compared to the presence of the Sisters on the other side of the frontier. And yet, even though one might be considered an experience of heaven and the other an experience of hell, their graced presence among these poor brings forth the possibility of hope and new life.

It is in both experiences that I sense clearly what God says to us in Zacharias' canticle: *"In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death and to guide our feet on the road to peace"* (Luke 1:78-79). That tender compassion of our God is the gift of Jesus Himself, the dawn from on high that has broken upon us, the gift of Jesus in his birth at Bethlehem who through his life, death, and resurrection continues to shine on those who dwell in experiences of darkness, despair, death and hell. And through His instruments of love they are guided on the road to peace.

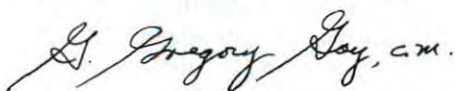
As members of the Vincentian family, my brothers and sisters, in this time of Advent we are called to be close to those whom we call our lords and masters when they live in situations of darkness and despair, being for them instruments of hope and life. Together as a Vincentian Family, and with our lords and masters, we are called to be builders, builders of solidarity with love as its foundation, not builders of walls that divide humanity. We are called to live the life of Jesus, that life that came to us the day He was born. He invites us to go beyond the limits, the boundaries, the frontiers that many times we have constructed ourselves, or that have been constructed by the society in which we live. Oftentimes they are the traditions that we have learned, or prejudices that we have simply adopted.

I would like to share a prayer that I came across as part of a service composed by the Commission for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, of the Union of Superiors General for the celebration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The prayer, called *The Beatitudes for Social Engagement*; has been adapted for our situation as a Family.

- Happy are you when you remain available, sharing in simplicity what you possess.
- Happy are you when you weep over the absence of happiness around you and throughout the world.
- Happy are you when you opt for gentleness and dialogue even when this seems long and difficult.
- Happy are you when you creatively devise new ways of donating your time, your tenderness and gems of hope.
- Happy are you when you listen with your heart to detect what is gift in others.
- Happy are you when you strive to take the first step, the necessary one to attain peace with brothers and sisters throughout the world.
- Happy are you when you keep in your heart wonderment, openness and free questioning of life.
- Happy are you when you take seriously your faith in the Incarnate Christ.

I ask you throughout this time of Advent to pray this prayer individually and with those with whom you share your lives. We have many experiences in our own lives of living without frontiers. These are experiences of the Story of Christmas, experiences of the presence of Jesus among us. May our own witness in the world be a sign that helps people leave the night and enter the day, walk from their darkness into a new light, lift them from despair and fill them with hope, pass them from death unto new life and out of hell into heaven. We can do that if we truly live the gift of the Incarnate Christ, the gift of His life, the gift of His love, the gift of His peace. We can do so, not only for those who are close to us, but for those who are far from our reach.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,



G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General



TEMPO FORTE CIRCULAR  
(6-13 December 2010)

Rome, 22 December 2010

*To the Members of the Congregation of the Mission*

My dear brothers of the Congregation of the Mission,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

We began our *tempo forte* with an ongoing formation session that was led by Brother George Gallardo of the Christian Brothers who spoke to us about the project of Solidarity in Southern Sudan, an intercongregational collaboration encouraged by the Union of Superiors General of men and women.

1. Our first matter of business was a **report given by the Superior General and the Vicar General** on the most recent meeting of the Union of Superiors General which was on the evangelization in Europe. Materials were distributed to the members of the council who in turn have been asked to reflect on that material and send what is appropriate to the provinces in Europe.

We also reflected on another article entitled "Religious Institute and the Art of Dying" written by a religious from Holland. We also, as part of an ongoing dialog, carried out a discussion on the canonical visits, each of us shared what we considered to be most essential to achieve in the canonical visits.

2. The Secretary General gave us a report on a project for **putting our Catalog on line**. Father Claudio visited a number of the General Curiae that have their Catalog on line. We already have a lot of the work done because our data base is up-to-date with regard to all the personnel of the Congregation of the Mission. It would be just a process of moving that database to an on-line status with all the security that is involved.
3. We also approved a **project of the General Archivist** regarding the digitalization of the canonization process of Saint Vincent de Paul. There are in existence only six copies of this multi-

volume work. It is recommended that we move in the direction of digitalization in order to protect the valuable information that we have in our archives, this being a prime example.

4. The Superior General discussed a letter that he has since sent to the four Universities of the Congregation of the Mission: Adamson in the Philippines, DePaul, St. John's and Niagara in the United States, regarding a **bank of Vincentian teachers**.
5. We introduced a new agenda item in our *tempo forte* meetings, a **report from each of the General Assistants**, regarding the areas of which they have been given responsibility. Father Varghese Thottamkara spoke to us about a workshop that he attended on General and Provincial Council meetings. Father Zeracristos spoke to us of a meeting that he attended on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. Father Stanislav Zontak gave us an update on the project of restructuring our *Ratio Formationis*. Eventually we will be naming a team of formators for the new *Ratio*.
6. We had a special orientation session with Father Robert Maloney who spoke to us on the workings of the **Commission for the Promotion of Systemic Change** as well as the international project of the Vincentian Family, Zafen, and an explanation of one of our partners in ministry and development, the Franz Foundation.
7. We then studied a report sent to us by the Director of the **Vincentian Solidarity Office**, Father Miles Heinen. As part of its responsibilities, the VSO is raising funds for our project in Haiti. The particular project that they will now be taking on has to do with feeding school children. Twenty-five schools are involved in this, nine of which are run by the Daughters of Charity. The hope is that each child will be given daily a hot meal.
8. We studied a number of **economic issues**, presented by the Econome General, Father John Gouldrick. Among these was an establishment of a set donation from the different provinces of the Congregation of the Mission in order to support the functioning of the General Curia. This topic was discussed during our General Assembly and was left to the Superior General and his council to decide on a system of donations that would be just. It is at this time of year that we approve the different budgets of the General Administration. We approved support of the International Secretariat of the JMV and a sizeable donation for the World Youth Day celebration of the Vincentian Youth in August 2011 in Madrid.



9. We had a report from the outgoing **Delegate for the Vincentian Family**, Father Manuel Ginete, who gave us, not only an update on what has taken place since the last *tempo forte* meeting but also an evaluation of his five years in the office of Delegate for the Vincentian Family. Both he and Sister Maria Pilar will be moving on to new assignments; so I want to take this opportunity to thank both of them for a very fine job in consolidating the operation of the Vincentian Family Office as well as consolidating the operation of the Vincentian Family throughout the world. Father Ginete's responsibilities as delegate will be passed on to the Assistant, Father Eli Chavez. He will have a new secretary from Brazil, as well as an assistant, a confrere from the Province of Central America.
10. Because of his new responsibility as Apostolic Visitor to Religious Life in Ireland **Father Robert Maloney** has asked to take a brief sabbatical from some of his major responsibilities in the Congregation and with the Daughters of Charity. We talked about possible temporary personnel who will fill in for him in the Zafen project as well as the DREAM project which he is connected with through the Daughters of Charity and the community of Sant'Egidio.
11. We had a video conference during *tempo forte* with Father John Freund, the **web master for FamVin**. John gave us a report on how media can be used to respond to each of the points that were developed in our Lines of Action from the General Assembly. A letter that will be written by the Superior General regarding evangelization and media is forthcoming.
12. We also had a special orientation given by Father Joe Foley, our **representative at the United Nations**. He spoke to us at length regarding his responsibility at the UN together with other members of the Vincentian Family, and his role vis-à-vis the General Council and the importance of this service in the evangelization of the poor, and the major issues that he and other members of the Vincentian Family deal with at the UN.
13. We read a report from the Directors of the **CIF program** in Paris. The last session that they had was well-received by the 15 participants including two brothers of the Congregation of Missionaries of Mercy. We also studied a draft letter that the superior General will be sending to the provinces requesting support in establishing scholarships in ongoing formation.

14. We reviewed information from the **Conferences of CEVIM and CLAPVI and COVIAM**. We spent time discussing the new mission of COVIAM that will be established in Chad on Easter Sunday, 2011. A contract that was agreed upon by the Bishop and the Congregation of the Mission was signed. The Council discussed different ways that we might be able to help support the mission in Chad financially, through the Mission Distribution Fund as well as soliciting help from the Vincentian Solidarity Office.
15. From the **mission in El Alto** we reviewed and renewed the contract with the Diocese of El Alto. It was signed and sent to the Bishop. We appointed a new member, José Emilo Torres Motta from the Province of Peru, to the mission team in El Alto. Father Torres will begin his integration into the community of El Alto 1 March 2011. Father Cyril de Nanteuil of the Province of Paris had his commitment to the mission in El Alto extended to another three-year period. We congratulate him on his vigorous missionary spirit and his willingness to continue to work among the people of Aymara. We also reviewed information from the new mission in Cochabamba. A letter from the Archbishop informs us that three confreres have been installed in the parish, two on a full-time basis and one the Director of the Daughters of Charity on a part-time basis.
16. We reviewed a report from the superior of the mission in **Papua New Guinea**, Father Homero Marin. There are a number of confreres who will be arriving at the mission but presently are awaiting their visas and work permits from the government. The good news is that the mission is expanding and the mission has asked permission to build a small formation house. Presently the vocations that come from Papua New Guinea share their formation with the students of Solomon Island and the Province of Australia in Fiji.
17. We also reviewed a report from the superior in the **Solomon Islands**, Father Greg Walsh. We renewed our contract with the bishops of the Solomon Islands and we reviewed a letter from the superior requesting volunteer missionaries to work in the diocese of Auke. It is our hope to expand to this diocese which has the greatest number of vocations in the seminary in the Solomon Islands at present. Solomon Islands also has a number of confreres who are waiting to arrive to the mission. The first of them will be Father Raul Castro from Argentina, who by the time this circular is out, will most likely be in Solomon Islands.



18. The confrere volunteer from the Province of Congo, Father Jean-Pierre Mangulu Mabondo is being considered for a **special mission in Haiti** and he will be discussing this matter with the Superior General and other members of the General Council.
19. We received five **volunteers for missions**. Of those five, two will be placed in a new mission which will soon be announced. I take this opportunity to thank all those confreres who generously offer themselves to the international missions or to the missions of other provinces throughout the Congregation which are in need of personnel. May the Lord bless you for this willingness to go beyond the boundaries of your own province in order to serve where the Church has needs.
20. As a final point, we discussed our **calendars for January, February and March**. Just a brief run-down of the commitments of the Superior General.

In January he will be in Madrid for the international meeting of the Vincentian Marian Youth Council. Also in January he will be in attendance at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Vincentian Family in Paris. In the second part of January he will make a visit to the Province of Ethiopia to participate in the ordination of a number of confreres and other events.

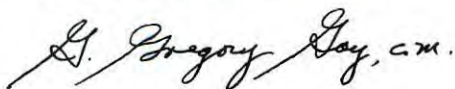
In February, the Superior General will participate in a meeting for new Visitatrix of the Daughters of Charity in Paris. From the middle of February to the end, he will visit the Province of Puerto Rico including the Dominican Republic where the northern zone of CLAPVI has its interprovincial internal seminary. The Superior General will also pay a visit to the Region of Haiti.

In March he will participate in the renewal of the vows of the Daughters of Charity on the feast of the Annunciation in Paris, and at the end of the month he will participate in the National Visitors Conference meeting in the United States. Other members of the General Council are still getting themselves rooted in their responsibilities and roles as well as learning different languages to carry out their duties.

*"Today you fill our hearts with joy as we recognize in Christ the revelation of your love. No eye can see his glory as our God, yet now he is seen as one like us. Christ is your Son before all ages, yet now he is born in time. He has come to lift up all things to himself, to restore unity to creation, and to lead us from exile into your heavenly kingdom" (Christmas Preface II).*

For this Lord, we give you thanks, we give you praise and we ask you to help us give witness by our living out of our vocations as members of the Congregation of the Mission. I take this opportunity to wish each and everyone of you a joyful Christmas and a peace-filled new year.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "G" and a long, sweeping underline.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General



Vincentian Reflections  
in a Year of Grace





## Reflection Introduction

*To the Vincentian Family and all the friends of Vincent and Louise.  
Dear Friends and Colleagues in the family of Vincent and Louise.*

In the name of the Heritage Commission for the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Deaths of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, I am happy to present the first two Reflection Papers to the Vincentian Family. The first one for October 2009 was written by Sister Julma Neo, DC, of the Province of the Philippines and is entitled, **Remembering Vincent and Louise: Two Great Prophets of Charity**. The second for November 2009 was written by Father Luigi Mezzadri, C.M., of the Province of Rome and is entitled, **Vincentian Spirituality: An Encounter with Christ in Poor People**.

Ten more will follow, two every two months. You can find them on line at [famvin.org/anniversary](http://famvin.org/anniversary) and you will also receive them from the leadership in each branch of the Vincentian Family through their normal channels of distribution.

The Commission hopes to reach every member of the Vincentian Family through these Reflection Papers. Success, however, depends on initiative at the local level.

As an individual member of the Vincentian Family, you are invited first of all to reflect on the theme of each month and take it to heart.

Then reach out. Reach out to four different groups: members of your own branch, members of other branches, co-workers in Charity, poor people and people in need. This could be a creative moment, a chance to open our eyes to new opportunities. If you live in a region where collaboration and planning are excellent, you are blessed. In any case, initiatives are not restricted to those in charge. Organization can be formal or informal, changing and growing from month to month.

We are fond of quoting Vincent saying, "The love of God is inventive to infinity!" Let us make creativity a hallmark of this year of celebrations.

It is a time for praying, reflecting, sharing and **action**. Simple gestures of friendship and mutual appreciation, love in action, an open door, an unexpected visit, gathering around the same table, discovering ways of creating new life among us. Small is beautiful. Plant seeds. Let them grow.

It has already been said, but it is worth repeating — involve co-workers and poor people. Welcome everyone eye to eye.

If you are looking for some guidelines for your group sharing and celebration, here are a few that have come to us.

Start the sharing with a prayer or song.

Invite the members of the group to share their responses to the questions for personal reflection. Let it be a time for listening to each person. Discussion might follow later.

After everyone has shared, have a time of silence, be conscious of the presence of the Spirit in the group speaking through the sharing of each member, listen to the Word.

The group leader may invite the group to mention the main themes they have heard.

The leader can then invite the members to pray aloud spontaneously.

The group can end with the prayer to the Founders.

Finally, share your experience with the larger family. The famvin website for the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is providing an opportunity to share your personal and local experience with the wider Vincentian Family. Please send your stories, photos, and notable discoveries to 350famvinen@gmail.com for English; 350famvines@gmail.com for Spanish; 350famvinfr@gmail.com for French; 350famvinit@gmail.com for Italian; 350famvinpt@gmail.com for Portuguese; and 350famvinpl@gmail.com for Polish.

I know all of you join the Commission in thanking the writers of these Reflections and the confreres and sisters who have done the translations. May the Spirit help us to capitalize locally on this unique opportunity!

Writing for the Commission, I am your brother in Saint Vincent,

HUGH F. O'DONNELL, C.M., Chairperson

*Members of the Commission:*

Madame SYLVIE LARMINAT (AIC France)

Sister ANGELES INFANTE BARRERA, DC (Spain)

Sister CARMEN VICTORIA RUIZ DE TORO, DC (Spain)

Sister LOUISE SULLIVAN, DC (USA-Canada)

Father JOSÉ CARLOS FONSATTI, C.M. (Curitiba, Brazil / CIF Paris)

Father MARCELO MANIMTIM VICTORIO, C.M. (Philippines / CIF Paris)

Sister MARIANA GRUBER, DC (Brazil)

Sister GLORIA ANIENBONAM, DC (Nigeria)

Sister SOCORRO EVIDENTE, DC (Philippines)

Father HUGH F. O'DONNELL, C.M. (China)



## Reflection 1

### REMEMBERING VINCENT AND LOUISE.... TWO GREAT PROPHETS OF CHARITY

Celebrations are a collective remembering of events that are significant for groups and communities. They bring together within a given moment the past, the present and the future. They evoke gratitude for the past, strengthen commitment to the present and generate hope for the future.

When we celebrate the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Vincent and Louise, it is not so much their death in itself that we want to remember. But their death as the culmination of their lives that left a mark in history because of what they stood for in their lifetime. They were icons of charity. They were two great prophets of charity.

#### Rekindling the Fire

In their life stories, their letters and conferences Vincent and Louise come across as ordinary persons with their frailties and gifts but who were able to attain great heights of holiness. They show in a remarkable way, how the power of grace can transform fragile earthen vessels into efficacious instruments of the divine project.

Vincent was an adventurous young man of rural origin who continually searched for wider horizons. He nurtured early ambitions for social promotion through the priestly ministry to help his family whom he dearly loved. He was gifted with an amazing capacity to enter into relations with a wide variety of persons — poor and rich, ecclesiastics and politicians, nobles and peasants, men and women, religious and lay. He would later put this gift to good use to realize his dream of serving the poor. Men of our time, who are constantly searching for “more” in life, can draw courage from Vincent's life.

Although Louise was born and raised with suffering as a constant companion, she did not allow this to deter her from pursuing her life goals. She was a loving wife, a devoted mother continually preoccupied with an only son. When she was widowed, she continued to reach out to others, especially the poor. Having discovered her life vocation with the help of Vincent, she became his faithful friend and collaborator. Together, they founded the Daughters of Charity, a radically new way of living feminine consecrated life in

their time. Many women today — religious and lay, single, widows and married — will find in Louise an inspiring model, one who eventually “made it” notwithstanding limitations imposed by birth, by nature and by circumstances.

After 350 years, Vincent and Louise continue to touch and to inspire generations. The fire of their charity still blazes and ignites many others. Celebrating their death anniversary rekindles this fire in us. It turns the past into a living present that transforms.

### **They Dared to Dream**

In their lifetime, Vincent and Louise pursued with relentless passion a dream they believed in, a dream that was like a fire that consumed them. They dreamt of giving themselves completely to following Christ by evangelizing and serving the poor of their time. This dream was like the North Star that guided every decision they made and every step they took.

Vincent and Louise, however, were not born with this dream. In fact they had other dreams when they were young, dreams like we all have. But as they tried to realize these early dreams, they were constantly hounded by disappointments, failures, unexpected twists and turns as though an unseen hand was standing in the way of their realization.

Gradually, Vincent and Louise discovered the meaning of these events that seemed to turn them away from the fulfilment of their dream. They were in reality God’s mysterious ways of revealing to them their vocation in life. Vincent and Louise were open to this revelation and allowed themselves to be led by the Spirit.

Both Vincent and Louise had been tormented by profound doubts of faith for some time, doubts that became veritable “dark nights” for them. But an experience of illumination for Louise and a firm resolve by Vincent to serve the poor changed the course of their lives. From then on, God became their all. They set aside their earlier dreams in order to follow God’s call for them, a call that unfolded through the mediation of events and persons. Having put their hands on the plough, Vincent and Louise never looked back.

In an epoch of never ending wars fought for religious and political reasons and of a poverty that defied imagination, Vincent and Louise dared to dream... a seemingly impossible dream. But with Providence guiding and sustaining them, with the remarkable gifts with which nature had generously endowed them and with the blessing of circumstances, the dream of Vincent and Louise slowly took shape: the Ladies of Charity (today, AIC Association of International Charities), the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.



As they pursued their dream with resolute single mindedness, Vincent and Louise were blazing new trails unaware, trails that contributed significantly to renewing the Church and the society in 17<sup>th</sup> the century in France and beyond.

### Keeping their Dream Alive Today

As we remember Vincent and Louise, we are grateful for the **charism** that God gave to them... a **charism** that as founders they transmitted to the Vincentian Family as a **gift** to the Church and to the world.

Creative fidelity is the other face of gratitude for the gift of Vincent and Louise. This fidelity sends us back to the origins of the Vincentian story, invites us to read the present in the light of their dream, to reread their dream in the light of today.

If Vincent and Louise were in our midst today, how would they read today's situation in the light of the Christ they wanted to follow? What word would they speak to us? How would they respond to the new situations that confront us today? What choices would they make?

Ours is a world radically different in many ways from that of Vincent and Louise. New questions force themselves upon us. In a world that has generated new forms of poverty, new faces of the poor, what and who should be our priorities? Vincent and Louise were constantly attentive to events as "locus" for encountering the Spirit. In a world obsessed with the "instant" and the "super fast," how do we continue to be truly attentive and discerning?

How does today's consciousness of the profound influence of relationships, social structures and the environment on the human person affect our "service of the whole person"? In the face of a near absolute confidence in technology and science, in efficiency and competence, what is the "more" that our Vincentian service can offer to our contemporaries?

Ours is a world that desires to be more inclusive, to go beyond the frontiers of race, culture, ethnicity, class, gender and religion. What does this imply concretely for our works among poor persons, for our practice of collaboration?

Our world has grown more and more secularized and turned in on itself while at the same time concerned about social justice. What challenges does this pose for our Vincentian service, for which faith vision and charity motivation are primordial?

We celebrate the death anniversary of Vincent and Louise in the midst of an unprecedented global crisis: moral, cultural, economic

and spiritual. How are we to reread the dream of Vincent and Louise in the light of this reality?

The People of Israel reread their Covenant with Yahweh from the perspective of the crisis they experienced while in exile. In so doing, they rediscovered the meaning of their identity as People of God. Vincent reread the Gospel from his experience of the poor and the turmoil that threatened to tear apart the society and Church of his time. In this way, he discovered his vocation in life and gave birth to a dream that deeply marked his time.

To reflect more deeply on the life stories and the writings of Vincent and Louise, to listen to the questions posed by our time, to allow ourselves to be challenged by them... to search together for some answers is to celebrate well the death anniversary of Vincent and Louise. It is to keep their dream alive.

### Forging Ahead, Together

We are heirs of a great legacy... sons and daughters of two great prophets of charity. In this common heritage, we take pride. Our bonds are strengthened. With a vast membership in all the continents, we as Vincentian Family have a great potential for making a difference in our time as Vincent and Louise did in theirs.

*A story is told of a young man, the son of a star baseball player. His first season playing was very disappointing. In his second season, he was doing so badly that he was certain he was going to be dropped from the team.*

*One day, however, he hit a homerun; things began to change for him. He found himself. He started hitting consistently. It was a turning point. Eventually, he went on to the majors. Someone asked him, "What caused the big change?" He said that the umpire who had seen his father play told him: "I can see his genes in you. You have your father's arms."*

We have the "genes" of Vincent and Louise. We have their heart and their spirit. Fidelity to their legacy urges us to forge ahead together, to be **prophets of charity** in today's world. Today's global reality e.g. the dominance by giant transnational corporations, mergers and conglomerates, calls for collective witnessing. It challenges us to become not simply individual prophets, but a "family of prophets."

In an era when injustice has assumed a global dimension, the dream of Vincent and Louise impels us to form networks of charity among the Vincentian Family. Networks of charity attentive to events



and to the poor, inventive and audacious in their responses manifest the perennial newness of the Vincentian charism. They create ripples of hope for the future.

For us, Vincentian Family, this celebration of the 350<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Vincent and Louise is indeed a time of grace, a propitious moment to “sink deep our roots in *charity* and spread wide our branches in *mission*,” to be prophetic and to generate hope. Let us take hold of it.

*“It is certain that when charity dwells in a soul, it takes possession of all its powers; it gives it no rest; it is a fire that is constantly active; once a person is inflamed by it, it holds him spellbound”* (SVP, Repetition of Prayer, August 4, 1655).

*“Please continue to serve our dear masters with great gentleness, respect and cordiality, always seeing God in them”* (SLM, Letter 361, June 1653).

## Guide for Personal Reflection

1. How has the story of Vincent or Louise influenced your life in the concrete?
2. Which challenge posed by our contemporary world to our Vincentian service of the poor is of greatest concern to you? Why? What steps can we take as Vincentian Family to address this challenge?
3. What are your hopes for yourself
  - a) as a member of the Vincentian Family
  - b) your branch of the Vincentian Family
  - c) the Vincentian Family worldwide so that the dream of Vincent and Louise be kept alive?

Written by

Sr. JULMA C. NEO, DC, Province of the Philippines





## Reflection 2

### VINCENTIAN SPIRITUALITY: AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST IN THE POOR

*Vincentian spirituality is not a doctrine but an encounter. an encounter not with Christ seen in a vision, but with Christ who lives in the poor. We will develop this theme in three stages: knowing, meditating, and serving.*

#### Knowing

Spirituality was in vogue in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. God was a common topic of discussion. Bremond spoke of “an invasion of mysticism.” Madame Acarie went into ecstasy every time she spoke of God. Holiness was thought to be a mystical reality; saints were those who had visions and performed miracles. It explains why people looked for extraordinary feats in the lives of the saints. This view, however, took away responsibility from the ordinary Christians, who saw holiness as out of their reach.

Among the Fathers of the Church St. Gregory Nazienzen developed the theory that there are three types of spiritual life: the contemplative (proper to monks and nuns, which was the highest), the active (proper to those who live in the world and was less perfect) and the mixed type (proper to pastoral action, which joined contemplation and action). As a result, contemplation was held to lead more easily to holiness, by way of mysticism, whereas for those who are immersed in the world only an ascetic holiness was possible, by way of asceticism. But St. Francis de Sales described two sisters, the first a nun, who was living like someone in the world, and the other a married woman, who was living like a nun. According to him, holiness was for everyone. However, this idea was not accepted unanimously. The religious vigorously defended the idea that it was only they who were “in the state of perfection.” It sharpened the contrast between active and contemplative life, between Martha and Mary.

#### Convergent experiences

Though the spiritual experiences of St. Vincent were very different from those of St. Louise, their routes, nevertheless, converged.

The route of St. Vincent was one of "spiritualization": in the first phase of his life (up to 1608/1610) he looked after himself; later, a crisis led him to discover that people need God.

The route of St. Louise was one of "humanization": in the first phase, she tried to escape to the monastery, later to escape from the responsibility of the family only to discover, after meeting St. Vincent, that God needs people.

Vincent in the events of Folleville and Châtillon (1617) and Louise in the experience of the Light of Pentecost (1623), discovered their vocation of being 1) dedicated to God 2) in order "to serve the neighbor," by responding to the hunger for Word and Bread.

## Meditating

### *A Spirituality of Love*

St. Vincent used the image of the heart very often. God is a God of the heart (XI, 156), "the lover of our hearts" (XI, 102; 145-147). "Let us ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, that disposes us to go as He went and as He would have gone, if His Eternal Wisdom had deemed it advisable to work for the conversion of poor nations" (Coste XI, 291; English, XI, 264).

His was a spirituality of the mystery of the Love of the Son of God made man and present in every person. He was, as Giuseppe Toscani has written, a mystic who "was not taken up by a fantastic imagination of Christ," inasmuch as he saw the poor in Christ. Medieval spirituality tended, following Plato, to disregard the body and go rather for the heights of the soul. Prayer was seen as "an elevation of the mind to God." The spirituality of St. Vincent follows rather the impulse of the Incarnation of "approaching the least person as God did in Christ." In the "kenosis" of humility, St. Vincent found Christ and the poor. While in the mystical tradition one speaks of "the night of the senses and the night of the spirit" as moments of emptying in order to see the face of God, St. Vincent allowed himself to be nailed to the Cross of the poor, "his burden and his sorrow." That is the reason why the poor become as Christ his "lords and masters."

St. Louise, in her turn speaks about "pure love," i.e., about love purified of any residue of human love. "The more difficult a place is for service, either because of poverty or for other reasons, the more we must rely on assistance from heaven when we are striving to labor for the pure love of God, which I sincerely hope is your intention" (Spiritual Writings, 610).



### *In the heart of the Trinity*

St. Vincent placed all this within the Trinity. He expressed this idea with the verb “to honor”, an expression that implies participation, filial recognition, and a sharing of Jesus’ regard for the Three Persons. St. Vincent felt loved as a son by the Father and felt invited to the table of the Trinity. Like the great mystics he felt the flow of the love of the Trinity: the Father who takes the initiative of love, the Son who receives, and the Spirit who realizes the communion and the union.

St. Louise, in her turn, felt the indwelling by the Spirit, as if the Holy Spirit was infused in her: “O Eternal Light, lift my blindness! O Perfect Unity, create in me simplicity of being! Humble my heart to receive Your graces. May the power to love which You have placed in my soul no longer stop at the disorder of my self-sufficiency which, in reality, is but powerlessness and an obstacle to the pure love which I must have as a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit” (Spiritual Writings, 818).

Mission is born of the Trinity; it does not come from a personal initiative. It is born by living in the Trinity. And from the Trinity a style of mission flows: “Let us ground ourselves well in this spirit, if we want to have within us the image of the adorable Trinity, if we wish to bear a sacred relation to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. What forms the unity and communion of the Three Persons? What shapes their love if not their perfect resemblance? And if there was no love between them, what would be lovable? Asks the bishop of Geneva. There is, therefore, uniformity in the Holy Trinity. What the Father wants, the Son also wants; and what the Holy Spirit does, so do the Father and the Son; all operate equally; they have but one same power and one same operation. Here is the origin of our perfection and our model” (Coste XII, 256-257; cf. Spiritual Writings, 818).

### *Incarnation*

Vincentian spirituality is Christocentric. St. Vincent did not propose particular devotions either for himself or for us (to saints, to places, to ideas), but he went right to the center of everything, to Christ (“You alone Lord”). “Smitten by love for creatures” (XII, 265), Christ left the throne of the Father to show God’s tenderness: “This tender love was the cause of His coming down from heaven; he saw humanity deprived of His glory; He was touched by their misfortunes” (Coste XII, 271; Leonard, 589).

Vincent tells us that he had truly found Christ. Vincent heard Christ’s voice in the suffering humanity of poor people, in the people

hungering for bread and for the word. Seeing the poor, he found Christ. He saw Christ in the "other." For the Saint of Charity the Incarnation is the origin of a new relation between Christ and humanity; it is at the root of a new vital impulse: "Let us look upon the Son of God. What a loving heart! What a flame of love!... Does a similar love exist? Who could love with such surpassing love? Nobody but the Lord, who was so smitten by the love of His creatures as to leave the throne of his Father to come and take a body subject to weakness. And why? To establish among us by his word and example love for one another. This is the love that crucified him and accomplished the work of our redemption. Oh, Gentlemen, if we had just a little of this love, would we remain with our arms folded? Will we allow those to perish whom we might assist? Oh, no, love cannot remain idle, it urges us to save and console others" (XII, 264 s.; Leonard, 584 f.).

The Saint lost no time in looking for other ways. He found Christ, he saw the poor and he sought "to build God's Kingdom." The phrase "the people are dying of hunger and are being condemned" was not a ploy to obtain favors from the Holy See, but an urgent scream of pain, a wound of the soul. Incarnation for Vincent was not a mystery to meditate on, but the source of action. According to Bremond, "it is not the love of others that has led him to holiness, it is rather holiness that made him really and effectively charitable; it is not the poor who gave him to God, but, on the contrary, God — i.e., the Word made Flesh — who gave him to the poor." We cannot, however, consider Vincent to be only a man of action and a distributor of alms, but a man of prayer who found the world in God, which made his prayer a prayer of love.

St. Louise invited the Sisters to let their love be strong, in such a way that they might be considered possessed by it and by the service of the poor, as if the two loves were only one thing. "Be very courageous then in the distrust you must have for yourself. I say the same thing to all our dear sisters. I desire all of them to be filled with a great love which will immerse them so sweetly in God and so charitably in the service of the poor that their hearts will no longer have place for so many of the thoughts that endanger their perseverance. Courage then, my dear Sisters. Seek only to please God by faithfully observing His commandments and evangelical counsels because the goodness of God has deigned to call us to this. This should lead us to observe our Rules exactly but also cheerfully and diligently. Serve your masters with great gentleness" (Spiritual Writings, 75).



### *To leave God for God*

The force of this incarnational principle was to invite the missionaries and the Sisters to “to leave God for God.” Because the poor are the poor of Jesus Christ, they are Jesus Christ, and leaving Jesus Christ in prayer, they would find him in his members. Humankind is, thus, the face of God and God is the face of humankind. Incarnation was, therefore, at the origin of Vincent’s anthropology. Calvet wrote, “(Vincent) is the one among us who has loved people most. He felt fully in his heart the feeling of fraternity, i.e., he believed, not by word, metaphor, or philosophical reflection, but completely and viscerally, that the beggar, the poor devil of the street, was his brother or sister.” A sentiment to this degree is very rare. Every day he would serve two poor people at table and he served them with supreme respect. All the saints have served the poor in order to be conformed to the spirit of the Gospel; he served them with pleasure. When he became the prior of St. Lazare, he found some insane persons abandoned by everyone, the rejects of humanity. He grew fond of them and treated them with tenderness, so much so that on the day that he had to leave the priory, he was asked what he would have hated leaving most and he came to the conclusion that it would break his heart most to leave those poor demented people no one was taking care of. If he chose the motto “to evangelize the poor,” it was because he was convinced that he was continuing the historical mission of the God-Man, who comes into the world, giving up his privileges and embracing poverty for the salvation of the human race. Hence, the evangelical character of his spirituality, which, without any other additions, is centered on the Trinity and Incarnation.

Frederick Ozanam understood this very well, perhaps the most faithful interpreter of St. Vincent, when he wrote of the poor: “We should prostrate ourselves at their feet and say to them with the Apostle: ‘You are my Lord.’ You are our masters and we are your servants; you are the sacred images of the God we do not see, and not being able to love him any other way, we love him in you” (to Louis Janmot).

### **Serving**

In the face of truths like these we cannot limit ourselves to purely rational considerations. The mystery is not something to be fathomed and comprehended, but it is an open door which beckons us.

In this anniversary year we also have to “enter” into Christ’s love. We, in loving Christ, are shaped by Him and adhere to Him,

and therefore we are in a condition to love as he did, he who was the evangelizer of the poor (Lk. 4:18-19). "God loves the poor; consequently, He loves those who love the poor; for, when we truly love someone, we have affection for his friends and for his servants.... In this way, we have good reason to hope, that, for love of them, God will love us. Come, then... let us devote ourselves with renewed love to serve persons who are poor, and even to seek out those who are the poorest and most abandoned; let us acknowledge before God that they are our lords and masters and that we are unworthy of rendering them our little services" (Coste XI, 392 f.; English, XI, 349). This love has two movements: upward, towards the Trinity in wonder and adoration, seeking to please God, and downward, to the advancement of the poor through gratuitous love. It is like Christ's glance from the Cross: a look of love to those in need, of a God who needs to be loved.

St. Louise said that we, "freed from all bonds," should "follow Jesus Christ" (Spiritual Writings, 689). From there flows a prayer that is *free* and *Christocentric*, that goes directly to Christ, steeped in the Gospel, without leading to many devotions; a prayer that is "in touch with pain" in the sense that in praying we cannot ignore the anxieties and the sufferings of humanity; an "evangelical" prayer, rich in expressions of faith in the Gospel: "*Lord, that I may see, Lord, make me walk, Lord, say only a word and your son, your daughter, will be healed, Lord, Son of David, have pity on me....*"

## Conferences

One of our most beautiful traditions is that of the colloquy (repetition of prayer). It means coming together to share thoughts, emotions, ideas. To speak together of God.

Let us read some passages and reflect together on them:

1. "May God in his goodness be pleased to give us the spirit that animates them (the missionaries that Vincent was praising), a big heart, vast and ample! *Magnificat anima mea Dominum!* Our hearts must magnify and amplify God, and may God amplify our souls for that, may he give us a broad understanding in order to be truly aware of the greatness and extent of the goodness and power of God; to know how far our obligation to serve and glorify him in every possible manner extends; a fullness of will to embrace every possible opportunity to procure the glory of God. If we can do nothing of ourselves, we can do everything with God. Yes, the Mission can do anything because we have in us the seeds of the omnipotence of



Jesus Christ. That is why no one can excuse himself on the grounds of his powerlessness; we will always have greater strength than is needed when the occasion arises" (XI, 203; English, XI, 192 f.).

*Is our vocation an encounter based on interior prayer or a mere adherence to a group of persons? Are we convinced that our Vincentian Family "can do all because we have in us the germ of doing everything in Jesus Christ?" Do you have an experience of this that you can share?*

2. "I must not judge a poor peasant man or woman by their appearance or by their apparent intelligence, especially very often they scarcely have the expression or the mind of rational persons, so crude and vulgar they are. But turn the medal and you will see with the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people; that He scarcely had a human face in His Passion, and passed for a madman in the mind of the gentiles and a stumbling block in the mind of the Jews. With all that, He describes Himself as the Evangelizer of the poor: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me. O Dieu! How beautiful it is to see poor people if we consider them in God and with the esteem in which Jesus Christ held them!* If, however, we look on them according to the sentiments of the flesh and a worldly spirit, they will seem contemptible" (English, XI, 26).

*Are the poor present in our prayer? Do we bring to mind faces, situations, needs?*

3. "Yes, Messieurs, we must be all for God and the service of the people; we have to give ourselves to God for that, wear ourselves out for that, and give our lives for that, strip ourselves naked, so to speak, in order to be clothed with Him — at least, we should desire to be so disposed, if we are not already — we should be ready and willing to come and go wherever God pleases, whether to the Indies or elsewhere; lastly, to devote ourselves willingly to the service of our neighbor and to extend the empire of Jesus Christ in souls; and I myself, old and infirm as I am, must, nonetheless, have this disposition, even to go to the Indies to win souls to God there, although I were to die on the way or on board ship" (English XI, 357).

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### Reflection 3

## THE SPIRIT OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

In spite of the passage of three hundred fifty years since the deaths of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, the identity between their spirit and its expression in our own times is undeniable. Nevertheless, the past is past and many things have changed: people, cultures, forms, customs, ideologies. Only the spirit abides unchanged. This spirit gives character and identity to Mission and Charity and has to be maintained following the clear and express desire of Our Holy Founders, whose example guides us into the future.

If this were not so, Mission and Charity would cease to be what the Spirit of God intended in giving Saint Vincent the Founder's charism. No matter what was on Vincent's mind or whatever topic he was discussing, the theme of "the spirit" cropped up constantly in his teaching and in the experiences he shared, witnessing to his spiritual and apostolic life and animating the Missionaries and the Daughters of Charity. Vincent was absolutely convinced that nothing worthwhile could be achieved without the evangelical spirit. In this he was of one mind with Saint Paul, who wrote, "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong Christ" (Rom 8:9).

Brother Bertrand Ducournau, the secretary of Saint Vincent, already in Vincent's lifetime, emphasized the great importance of recording the words and deeds of the Holy Founder, in order to live out the spirit he bequeathed to us. "Now, it is important that the talks of M. Vincent be preserved in the Company so that, if God is pleased to maintain it, they may reveal in all ages and to every nation the spirit of this apostolic man, which will be even more esteemed when it is seen how similar it is to the spirit of the Gospel; and this esteem, necessary for Founders of Communities, will contribute notably to the growth and sanctification of our own" (CED XII, 447; CCD XI, xxxix).

This conviction was shared by those who succeeded Our Holy Founder in the government of the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family. Undoubtedly, the most important theme for them was the cultivation of the "fundamental" spirit of the community, since only in this way would the community be a real witness to Christ and servant of the Church and of the poor. They put their trust in Our Holy Founder, because they saw he was authentic in word and action as Ducournau had said.

## Clothe yourselves with the spirit of Christ

When we look closely at the words and the life of Saint Vincent de Paul, we are impressed by the efforts he made to empty himself of himself and fill himself with the Spirit of God and of his Son Jesus Christ, sent into the world to evangelize the poor. When Vincent speaks, however, it is not always easy to know which spirit he is referring to, whether it is to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit, or to "spirit" with a small letter, which has many meanings, for example, style or way of being and action, vigor and strength, mood, energy, or apostolic drive.

It would have been wonderful if Saint Vincent took time to explain his experience of the Holy Spirit and the attraction of Jesus, but in fact he limited himself to a few words: "When... the Holy Spirit is at work in someone, it means that this Spirit, residing in that person, gives him or her the same inclinations and dispositions Jesus Christ had on earth, and they cause the person to act in the same way — I am not saying with equal perfection, but according to the measure of the gifts of that Divine Spirit" (CED XII, 108; CCD XII, 196).

Judging from this, there is not the least doubt that there is a close link between dependence on the Holy Spirit and the spirit of Jesus. The trilogy (Jesus Christ, evangelization and the poor) puts Vincent's thought and spiritual and pastoral experience in a nutshell and gives unity to his teaching, especially his teaching to the Missionaries and the Daughters.

Impelled by the Spirit, Jesus used to go pray alone in the desert and on the mountain and also frequented the synagogues, where he taught from the Scriptures and cured the sick. This example of Jesus moved Saint Vincent to act in the same way. The Spirit of God led him to resemble Christ, whose spirit of love and compassion transformed his followers into apostles of the Good News as well as disciples who would continue the charitable mission of the Savior of the World.

Dependence on the Holy Spirit, therefore, translates into following Jesus Christ — the missionary who was close to the people, simple, humble, meek, in control of himself and full of zeal for the glory of the Father and the salvation of the people. Such apostolic virtues constitute Vincent's identity and are the proper and fundamental virtues of his congregations. Vincent comments that humility is our "seal" and our "password." "Let us pray that, if someone should ask us about our state, the Lord may allow us to say, 'It is humility.' Let this be our virtue. If someone says to us, 'Who goes there?' we can say, 'Humility!' May this be our password!" (CED XII, Conference 203, April 18, 1659). Vincent used the same or similar



words to refer to other virtues that constitute the spirit of Mission and Charity, comparing them to the potencies of the soul which enable the exercise of charity.

The Pauline formula “clothe yourself with the spirit of Christ,” was prized by Vincent, who made clear its necessity and urgency in contacting poor people. “My idea was that men who are called to continue Christ’s mission, which is mainly preaching the Good News to the poor, should see things from his point of view and want what he wanted. They should have the same spirit he had and follow in his footsteps” (Prologue of the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission).

If the benefits reaped for the Church and the poor by those who make every effort to let themselves be penetrated by the missionary spirit are incalculable, the same does not happen for those who resist God’s Spirit, since, in refusing the Spirit’s sanctifying and apostolic action, they are like two-dimensional Christians, sleep walking, bodies without souls, dried up branches, shadows of true missionaries. These comparisons point out, on the one hand, that whatever they do fails to advance the mission of the Spirit, and, on the other, the urgency of putting on the spirit of Jesus Christ Evangelizer, in order to continue his work of salvation through love.

### **Filled with the spirit of Christ**

When commenting on charity and speaking descriptively about solidarity with those who suffer, Vincent shared with us his deepest sentiments, “To be a Christian and to see our brother or sister suffering without weeping with him or her, without being sick with him or her! That is to be lacking in charity; it is being a caricature of a Christian; it is inhuman; it is to be worse than animals” (CED XII, 271; CCD XII, 207).

In any case, if Saint Vincent does not always clarify the difference between obedience to the Holy Spirit and the vocation to follow in the footsteps of the compassionate and merciful Jesus, the context and the purpose of his presentations help us to know his meaning. His journey from his “conversion” through his formation in the spirit depended on the charism for extending the Kingdom of God and forming his disciples to evangelize by word and deed. We cannot forget that a founder’s charism remains in force, and in this case, it is the charism of Charity.

The facts are clear: the vitality of the apostolic works, missions and various services to the poor demonstrate that his apostolic zeal came from a fire within Saint Vincent and his first followers,

who were real heroes in the struggle against evil. There is no other explanation that will bring us to the above mentioned conclusion, although we can try to prove it with arguments reinforced by the behavior and historical data of our forefathers.

We have to remember that Our Holy Founder urged his companions to be filled with Christ and in this way live out the Christian gift they received in baptism. "All the baptized are clothed with His Spirit, but all do not do its works. Each individual, then, has to strive to be conformed to Our Lord, to distance himself from the maxims of the world, and to be bound in affection and practice to the examples of the Son of God, who became man like us in order that we might, like Him, be not only saved, but saviors; that means, by cooperating with Him in the salvation of souls" (CED XII, 113; CCD XII, 196). It is for this that they entered the community: to be good Christians and followers of Christ.

He said very clearly to the Daughters of Charity, "If you are really faithful in the observance of this way of life, Sisters, you will all be good Christians. I would not be saying as much if I told you that you would be good nuns. Why do people join religious Orders if not to become good Christian men and women?" (CED IX, 15). What "observance" was he referring to? Nothing other than the exercise of affective and effective love for the poor and needy, love poured out in their hearts by water and the Spirit.

It is a question, then, of putting into practice the demands of our baptism, because "the grace received in baptism gives this desire. Yes, the Spirit of Our Lord gives the same penchant for virtue that nature gives for vice" (CED XII, 206). And also, "the state of being Missioners is an apostolic state, which consists of leaving and abandoning all things, like the Apostles, to follow Jesus Christ and to become true Christians" (CED XI, 163; CCD XI, 157).

Consequently, it is not possible in practice to separate docility to the Spirit and the following of Jesus Christ, whose closeness to people and goodness shine forth in the gospel and in the teaching of the Apostles. Christ was close to the people and the confidence he inspired in people who were poor in body and soul made them come close to him. He was full of compassion and mercy, performing signs and miracles, pardoning sins and bringing health to the sick.

As a conclusion to this section, we can be sure that "to be in Christ" is interchangeable with "to be in the Spirit." This is the key to deciphering the spiritual and apostolic qualities of the life of Saint Vincent, who used to say: "Let us enter into His mind so that we may enter into His workings. Doing good is not everything; we have to do it well..." (CCD XII, 201) which is in accordance with what the Evangelist said of Jesus, "He did all things well" (Mc 7:37).



## Fidelity to the spirit of Christ

Everyone knows that the contemporary situation at present tends to threaten and militate against the genuine spirit of Mission and Charity. So we have to guard against present dangers, in order that we do not lose or weaken the spirit bequeathed us by Our Founder. Every age knows the ebb and flow of history, has its ups and downs, its advances and defeats.

Saint Vincent was a man of his times in striving to provide suitable remedies for the calamities afflicting the Church and society of his day. At the same time, he prepared his congregations to face anything that might endanger or ruin the work of Mission and Charity by opposing the contemporary fashion of seeking innovation. His spiritual and pastoral prescriptions were summarized in *the development of the evangelical spirit*.

The consumerism and hedonism of our times is a constant test for those who are committed to a more radical following of Jesus, which presupposes death to egoism, the origin of every evil and of fighting among brothers and sisters. Weariness, laziness and the absence of fidelity to one's word are commonplace today. A lack of perseverance and an excess of desires are opposed to the freedom of God's children, whose primary vocation is to tend to holiness with determination.

Nevertheless, Saint Vincent always had in the mind the motto of Saint Paul, even if he did not mention it expressly: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). It does not matter what obstacles come our way, because nothing will be able to separate us from the love of Christ nor from savoring the fruits of his Holy Spirit: joy, patience, kindness and self control. This might look strange to the eyes of someone absorbed by his own self and the transient attractions of this world, but experience shows that no one is happier or freer, more effective and convincing, than someone who gives his or her life in love under the influence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

To quote only one contemporary pontifical document, let us consider what Pope Paul VI wrote in the apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*: "The world calls for and expects from us simplicity of life, the spirit of prayer, charity towards all, especially towards the lowly and the poor, obedience and humility, detachment and self-sacrifice. Without this mark of holiness, our word will have difficulty in touching the heart of modern people. It risks being vain and sterile" (n. 76).

Saint Vincent points us to the future when he says, "Do what you will, people will never believe in us if we do not show love and compassion to those whom we wish to believe in us" (CCD I, 276 f.).

The many years that separate us from the Great Saint of Charity are not an obstacle to participating in his charism and spirit of love, because the source of grace is inexhaustible and has no temporal or spatial limits. It is a responsibility of every follower of Saint Vincent not to allow the fire of love to be extinguished, rather to hand on the torch of apostolic zeal to future generations for the good of the Church and of the poor. It is beyond doubt that the future of the Vincentian Family depends on cultivating the spirit in which and for which we were born, by adhering to the person of Jesus Evangelizer of the poor, source of apostolic dynamism and joy.

### Questions for personal and group reflection

1. Do I thoroughly know the spirit of Saint Vincent's, or do I limit it to knowledge and does not involve personal and pastoral commitment in the Church and in the world?
2. On what do I base personal and community efforts to sustain the genuine spirit of the Congregation, or to recover it, if it has been lost?
3. In practice can a missionary separate docility to the Holy Spirit and putting on the spirit of Christ — simple, humble and full of zeal for the glory of the Father and the extension of the Kingdom?
4. Do we need to call to mind today that everyone who wants to be an excellent missionary must first be an excellent Christian, faithful to the promises and commitments of baptism, living worthy of the name he or she bears?
5. How do I express in my own words and action that having (or not having) the evangelical spirit is a question of life or death for the community and for myself?

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## Reflection 4

### SPIRIT OF LOUISE DE MARILLAC

1660 was a year of great loss for the Vincentian Family. Antoine Portail, Vincent de Paul's first confrere and the first Director of the Daughters of Charity, died in February. His collaborator and friend, Louise de Marillac died in March and Vincent himself died in September. While Vincent's name and countenance have been universally recognized since the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, those of Louise de Marillac faded completely into the background. It would only be in 1983 that she would emerge from Monsieur Vincent's shadow to resume her place on an equal footing with him not only as the Foundress of the Daughters of Charity but as a woman of today who, by her words and actions, is capable of awakening in her fellow men and women the awareness of their proper dignity as children of God and servants of all those who are poor. Thus, in 2010, 350 years after the death of Vincent and Louise, the Vincentian Family from all corners of the world is uniting to celebrate this important anniversary and at the same time discover or rediscover Louise de Marillac.

#### **Who was Louise de Marillac in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century?**

In May 1629, Vincent de Paul sent the young widow he had met a few years earlier to visit the Confraternities of Charity which had begun so well but were, in more recent times, losing their initial zeal. They needed to revive the enthusiasm that had characterized their beginnings. In Vincent's eyes, no one was better suited to undertake this task than Louise de Marillac, known after her marriage to Antoine Le Gras as Mademoiselle Le Gras since her husband was not of the nobility. She succeeded remarkably well and Vincent rejoiced in her success.

When Vincent and Louise met at the end of 1625 or in early 1626, she had just lost her husband after a long, painful illness. She found herself alone with a difficult 12-year-old son and in financial distress. She was a fragile woman seeking her way. Vincent accompanied her. Little by little he discerned, behind the outward appearance of doubt, hesitancy, and anxiety, a strong woman, endowed with exceptional gifts, capable of transforming herself into the Vincentian leader he was looking for to collaborate with him in his charitable endeavors.

The "sending out on Mission" of May 1629 was but the beginning of a friendship and collaboration that would permanently alter feminine consecrated life and the service of those most in need in France and beyond and which continues to this day throughout the world. In the midst of all this radical change stands the figure of Louise de Marillac. She it was who saw early on the necessity of bringing together into a community the "good village girls" she was forming, at Vincent's request, to assist the Ladies of Charity in serving the sick poor in their homes. At one and the same time, she founded the Daughters of Charity and built a bridge over the chasm separating the rich and powerful from the peasants and the poor as well as men from women. With Vincent de Paul and the first Daughters of Charity, she created a vast network of charity which excluded no one.

Vincent de Paul had a grand vision of responding to the needs of those who were poor. Louise de Marillac had the organizational ability, the attention to detail, the daring, and the creativity to concretize the vision. One needs only to look at her work with the Foundlings, for which she was so impassioned, undoubtedly because of her own birth as a "natural daughter," that is, born of an unknown mother but recognized by her father, or her establishment of the Hospice of the Holy Name of Jesus for the elderly to recognize the truth of this affirmation.

### **Why did she disappear?**

In light of all that has just been said about the close and fruitful collaboration between Vincent and Louise, the foundation of the Daughters of Charity, and the development of works of charity responding to a whole gamut of needs of those living in poverty, one is rather astonished at the nearly total disappearance of Louise de Marillac. Even after her canonization in 1934 (two centuries after Vincent de Paul's) and the celebration of the bi-centennial of their deaths in 1960, little mention was made of her.

The response is twofold. Firstly, there was the effort to glorify Vincent and to have him canonized as quickly as possible after his death as the great Apostle of Charity. There was a place in this plan for the Daughters of Charity, but as daughters of Saint Vincent de Paul. There was no place for a collaborator who gave flesh and bones to his ideas. Thus, no one spoke or her much less of her contributions. However, it must be acknowledged that during her lifetime Louise de Marillac never sought to put herself forward. She tells us herself:



*Our Lord, born in poverty and obscurity, teaches me the purity of His love..., thus I must learn to remain hidden in God, desiring to serve Him without seeking recognition from others or satisfaction in communicating with them, content that God sees what I am striving to become. To this end, He wants me to give myself to him so that he can form this disposition in me. I do so with the help of His grace.*

The second reason is more complex. Within the Company of the Daughters of Charity, there was apparently a reticence, albeit a refusal, to advance the cause of canonization of a foundress who was a “natural daughter.” The Company finally took the necessary steps but without much enthusiasm. If it is true that saints have their moment, Louise’s had not yet arrived. For that to happen, one had to wait until the 1980’s.

### Why did she reappear?

If Louise de Marillac finally comes out of the shadows in 1983, it is because the soil had been prepared in beginning in 1958 with the publication of her biography by Jean Calvet entitled: *Louise de Marillac: A Portrait* (ET 1959). In this book, the author speaks publically and for the first time of the circumstances of her birth, of the dramatic often traumatic events of her childhood and youth and of her life marked by fleeting happiness and suffering that was never far away. His goal was “truth companion of sanctity.” He recognizes Louise’s tendency to walk in Vincent’s wake as his shadow. Calvet wanted “to discover her originality and to put forward her own greatness as one of the purest glories of French women.”

Two other significant elements are essential if the true Louise de Marillac is to emerge namely: the woman’s movement and the reflection of Vatican Council II on the dignity of the human person (Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*). The propitious moment will occur only in 1983 with the publication of a new edition of the *Ecrits spirituels de Louise de Marillac* (ET *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac*, 1991). Thanks to a more readable presentation, a new arrangement and chronology, numerous notes, and a detailed index, we discover, especially in Louise’s letters to her sisters, her engaging personality, her human warmth, and her attentiveness to others in all the dimensions of their being.

## What does Louise convey to today's world?

The original French edition revealed the "true" Louise to the French speaking world. The translations that followed in numerous languages spread her reputation around the globe. What portrait of her do they put forth? Exactly what does this strong, liberated woman of her era bring to women and men of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Much has changed since the epoch of Louise de Marillac, but over the centuries, she brings universal and lasting values and the warmth of human relationships to a world dominated by technology. Three hundred and fifty years after her death, some of these values take on particular importance for the Vincentian Family namely:

### Role of women

**Peasant Women:** Well before organized efforts to do so, Louise sought to improve the status of peasant women by: opening the opportunity to them to enter a new form of consecrated life; by human, spiritual, and professional formation; by preparation for responsibility as educators for the Foundlings, school mistresses for poor little girls, and nurses for persons who were sick and abandoned. She told these first sisters:

*...you should be very grateful for the graces God has given you by placing you in a position to render Him such great service.... Do not be fearful....*

**Middle Class and Noble Women:** Louise de Marillac was well placed to be the link between the peasant women who were the first Daughters of Charity and the Ladies of Charity who were from the upper and middle class. As a de Marillac, she had her place in this milieu but she had chosen to live in community with peasant women. While she formed the early Daughters of Charity, often in collaboration with the Ladies of Charity, her role with the Ladies was largely as an animator. By her words and especially by her comportment, she tried to help them: to discover under outward appearances, the dignity of persons who were poor; to respect and to work as equals with the Daughters of Charity. She wrote:

*...the Ladies of Charity recognized the needs of those who were poor and.... God gave them the grace to assist them so charitably and so magnificently.... Were not the means these charitable Ladies used for their distribution plan their holy Assemblies... which provided faithful and charitable subjects to recognize true needs and to provide for them prudently, not only corporally but also spiritually...?*



## Network of Charity

Louise de Marillac never considered the service of those who are poor as reserved to a particular group. For her, the diversity and extent of needs required a vast network of collaboration: men and women, Ladies of Charity, Priests and Brothers of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, and Fathers of the Poor (Municipal Administrators). To insure efficacious service, this collaboration had its requirements.

**First:** A work of Vincentian collaboration asks of everyone involved the will to recognize and accept the personality of the other with its qualities and faults. Louise told her sisters:

*Renew yourselves in the spirit of unity and cordiality... the practice of charity... leads us never to see the faults of another with bitterness but rather always to excuse them while humbling ourselves.*

**Second:** Such collaboration demands of all: mutual respect, openness to the ideas of others while knowing how to express one's own. Louise wrote:

*Present your reasons, humbly, forcefully, gently, and briefly.*

**Third:** Finally, the service of those who are poor is never truly Vincentian unless it is characterized by human warmth, by the feminine qualities Louise spoke of so often modeled her life on: compassion, tenderness, gentleness, in a word **LOVE**.

*Be very gentle and kind with the poor; you know they are our masters and we need to love them tenderly and respect them greatly. It is not enough that we feel this in spirit, it is necessary that we witness to it with our charitable care.*

## Questions for personal and group reflection

1. How does reflection on Louise de Marillac touch me?
2. How can her influence touch my group in the Vincentian Family?

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## Reflection 5

### WHO WAS JESUS FOR VINCENT?

When we see Christ as Missionary and Servant we penetrate to the central core of the Vincentian Mystique and are assured of living today in his spirit. At the same time we know for certain that the encounter with the person of Jesus always generates an interior experience like that which St. Vincent himself lived profoundly with energy and conviction. It shows us how we can be, in our turn, wonderful witnesses of Christ today.

#### 1. Jesus, our strength and our life

When we speak of Christ, we are in Saint Vincent's privileged circle, namely, the French School of Spirituality, which was centered on Christ. Vincent lived "with his eyes fixed on Jesus Christ" very much like the listeners in the synagogue of Nazareth. His whole focus was on the Savior and he had his own vivid images to nourish our meditation today: Jesus is "our strength," "our life," "our food" (CCD VIII, 20); he is the living place of all virtues: "Humility, meekness, forbearance, patience, vigilance, prudence and charity" (CCD, VIII, 268); he is "the rule of the Mission" (CED, XII, 130); "the eternal sweetness of men and angels" (CCD, IV, 59); "our father, our mother and our all" (CCD, V, 537); "the life of our life and the only aspiration of our hearts" (CED, VI, 576); "the great invisible portrait on whom we must fashion all our actions" (CCD, XI, 201). A fitting summary are these words etched by his first biographer: "Nothing pleases me save Jesus Christ" (Abelly I, 103 Engl.). Without a trace of doubt, the imitation of Jesus Christ is his attachment at every instant, "his book and his mirror," according to the beautiful expression of the bishop of Rodez (Abelly, Book III, 88 Engl.).

Saint Vincent wrote to a confrere jealous of the pastoral successes of another: "Must not a priest die of shame for claiming a reputation in the service he gives to God and for dying in his bed, when he sees Jesus Christ rewarded for his work by disgrace and the gibbet. Remember, Monsieur, we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ, and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ, and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ" (CCD, I, 276). Christ is at the center of Vincentian

spirituality and also of our missionary strategy. First of all, we are the continuation of Christ and his mission and he is the principal agent and the Missionary of the Father. He is God's ambassador. Eight times in the few texts that are left to us of his, Vincent uses this passage taken from Luke 4:18: "He sent me to bring good news to the poor." Vincent is profoundly struck by Jesus as Savior. He feels invested with the same mission. He also wishes to be liberator: "In this vocation, we are very much in conformity with Our Lord Jesus Christ, who seems to have made His principal aim, in coming into the world, to assist poor people and to take care of them. *Misit me evangelizare pauperibus.*" And if we ask Our Lord, "What did you come to do on earth?" "To assist the poor." "Anything else?" "To assist the poor" (CCD, XI, 98). We are, therefore, by all means missionaries following the one and perfect Missionary. The Gospel is the essential word to announce to the poor: "It is our principal business." It cannot, therefore, be frustrated.

This insight will become clearer and more refined when we start from the contemplation of the mysteries of the gospel.

### *Our contemporary challenge*

The Gospel is for all times. The person of Jesus is timeless. In his presence we face a perpetual challenge. Our first duty is *imitation*. To enter into his sentiments, to rediscover his thoughts and his directions, to contemplate his actions, to put our steps in step with his, is the first thing we have to do. Imitation does not mean simply copying Jesus magically, but implies an adaptation of his ways of thinking and acting to our time. It calls for the necessary contribution of *daily prayer* which makes us contemplate the responses of Jesus and adapt them to our time. This is perhaps the biggest challenge facing the Vincentian Family today. Pursuing *aggiornamento*, we often have done away with or reduced this daily encounter which is the only means to conform our lives to that of Christ. The celebration of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary gives us the opportunity to renew the hour of prayer prescribed by our Constitutions (CM) in n° 47 § 1: "In this way we are enabled to discern the mind of Christ and to find suitable ways of fulfilling his mission." It is clear that the requirement of prayer for one hour is a personal responsibility. Part can be in common, for example, a half hour, and the other part individual. Beyond these prescriptions which principally concern the community plan, it is necessary to find again the spirit which animates them: to live in Christ as St. Vincent did. There is no other way to sanctification and missionary action.



## 2. To know Christ and transmit his message

To know Christ leads to the transmission of his message. Once this task of penetration is accomplished, everything then becomes a question of presentation. Above all, it is not a question of grand words. Saint Vincent avoided the beautiful expressions and flights of fancy prevalent in his time! He recommended *the little method* because "it is the method which the Son of God used to announce his Gospel to men" (CCD, XI, 242). Beyond the mechanics which makes one smile today: — nature, motives, and means —, Saint Vincent recommended a simple, concrete, familiar, ordinary manner of speech. Let the preacher beware of "dressing up and falsifying the word of God" (CCD, XI, 258). What is important for St. Vincent is to announce Christ and to do it with words which are simple and understood by the people. While his century breathed of sophistication and complicated language, he revolutionized preaching and recommended simplicity. He insisted on the use of examples: "Our Lord when He went to sit on that stone that was near the well, and, once He was there, began to instruct that woman by asking her for some water. 'Woman, give me some water,' He said to her. So, he [the Brother] can ask one, then the other, 'Eh bien! How are your horses getting along? How's this? How's that? How are you doing?'" (CCD, XI, 344 — suggestions to the Brothers on evangelizing in their ordinary ministry). We still hear him say: "Oh! How happy they will be who can say, at the moment of death, these words of Our Lord: The Lord has sent me to bring good news to the poor! See, my brothers, the principal work of Our Lord is to work for the poor" (CCD, XI, 232-237).

### *Our contemporary challenge*

It is easy to see the relevance today of such a recommendation, since the mission is addressed to the poor, the little ones, the simple, the ones thirsty for God and not the literati. Life is the primary interest of the true missionary. He starts from day-to-day events, the situation of each person, of his or her needs, of their concerns, of their concrete desires. Imperceptibly, as Jesus with the Samaritan woman, he passes from the concrete to the hidden, from what is seen to what is desired, from appearances to what is real. And he is careful about his **language**. Today, in order to speak with the hope of being heard, the missionary must watch his language. What do we say? How do we say it? We cannot put up roadblocks to the presentation of faith and catechesis. We can no longer present faith in terms of obligation: "...one must... they should... one has to..."

but in terms of proposals. I remember a very interesting study on the language of Taizé, particularly that of Brother Roger whose way was **to suggest, encourage and motivate**. How are we to be clear, make suggestions, teach and challenge effectively? The question of language is a real question today and one that we need to study, verify and renew without losing the substance of the message. Paul VI has already awakened us to that which transforms without betraying, that which inculturates without denaturing, that which invigorates without emptying (E.N. 63).

Evangelizing today can therefore be perceived as a new proclamation, a new announcement. It is the social context which calls for *new* evangelization. There are realities which press on us: profitability, immediacy, efficiency at all costs, appearances, the dominant ideologies, the new ethical questions (cloning, ecology, the blurring of identity) and at the same time the fear of emptiness, hunger for the spiritual, the search for meaning, the thirst for the other.... Viewed positively or even ambivalently, one sees the search for the Absolute, a desire for living together, a sensitivity to group and social feeling, and of all that constitutes the human. All of this is open to the possibility of announcing Jesus Christ. "We need to learn to convey solidarity and the originality of the Christian message, the emotion and the understanding of faith" (Christophe Rocrou of the Mission of France)

### 3. The Missionary and Servant Christ

The missionary Christ of St. Vincent is inseparable from the Servant Christ. Beyond a contemplation of the mystery of Christ, of a transmission of his message, we know very well that St. Vincent saw Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ. We live the unceasing and urgent call of Matthew 25:40. All Vincentians are called to follow him in the way of service. Commitment to a pure and radical way of life is made daily by a movement of the heart: to serve the poor is to serve God! In order to do that, one needs only to look at Jesus Christ himself. He is the Word of God incarnate, a human among humans, who spends his time in prayer, living in a state of permanent communication with his Father: "My Father and I are one" (John 10:30). But he is also the one who serves people every day with unbounded devotion: "Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and curing every disease and illness" (Mt 9:35). Jesus holds himself to service as he asks his disciples to do in Luke 12:35: "Gird your loins." He calls us "servants," a word which we find 76 times in the four



Gospels. But the supreme example is that of the washing of feet: "And I, I am with you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27). He gives the witness of the one who lowers himself before the others and divests himself of any superiority, any divine claim in order to place himself in service and to wash the feet of his apostles, a gesture reserved normally to the slave: "What touched me the most in what was said today and last Friday is what has been told about Our Lord, who was the natural Master of everyone and yet made himself the least of all, the disgrace and abjection of men, always taking the last place wherever he went. Perhaps, my dear confreres, you think that a man is truly humble and has really abased himself when he has taken the last place. *Eh quoi!* Does a man humble himself when he takes the place of Our Lord? Yes, brothers, the place of Our Lord is the last place. The man who wants to be in charge can not have the spirit of Our Lord; that Divine Savior did not come into the world to be served but rather to serve others; He practiced this magnificently, not only during the time He stayed with His parents and with the persons He was serving in order to earn His living, but even, as several holy Fathers have felt, during the time His Apostles were staying with Him, by serving them with His own hands, washing their feet, and getting them to rest from their labors" (CCD, XI, 124). Let us not forget that this washing of the feet took place on the eve of Calvary, the place of his supreme gift! Vincent understood well the fullness of Christ giving of himself in "this command of love and charity" (CED, XII, 13). This Christ brings us to our knees. "Let us ask God to preserve us from this blindness; let us ask him for the grace always to seek lowly places" (CCD, XI, 351). The Most-High becomes himself when he is the Lowest. The Daughters of Charity who would call themselves and be known as "unworthy servants of the poor," were born of this abasement and it makes sense according to Vincentian logic. "To be true Daughters of Charity you must do what the Son of God did when He was on earth. And what did He do mainly? After submitting His Will and obeying the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph, He worked constantly for His neighbor, visiting and healing the sick and instructing the ignorant for their salvation. How fortunate you are, Sisters, to be called to a state of life so pleasing to God! In addition, however, you must take great care not to abuse this and strive to become more perfect in this holy state of life. You, poor village girls and daughters of workmen, have the happiness of being among the first women called to this holy ministry" (CCD, IX, 14). The confreres were to become themselves servants in unforeseen situations; they became administrators, attendants to the sick and even undertakers! To become servant after the example of Christ is a state of life. "To be at the service of"

implies a total commitment at every instant. One is never "out of service" but always on the alert. Saint Vincent applies this condition instinctively to his followers. Service puts one in "the state of charity." For all times and places.

### *Our contemporary challenge*

It is clear that St. Vincent wants to see his followers be experts in bodily and material service; he puts us on the path of the charitable Christ, open to all infirmity, to solidarity, to works of accompaniment. After his example, he sends them continuously to explore the ways of the Good Samaritan among "the rejects of society, the victims of calamities and of injustice." There is a vast field of mission, faithful to the intuitions of Saint Vincent, faithful to the vision which he has of Christ. The servant of the gospel, Jesus, challenges us when he cures the sick, listens to those who implore him, resurrects the dead, and performs the deeds announced by Luke 4:18-22. The applications of this servant Jesus are numerous today, and lead us into the fields of ethics, justice, peace and social life in general. But beyond the distinct contingencies of each region, would not the Vincentian Family be well advised to target its charitable and social action at a precise objective? Perhaps we need to make a choice that would be unifying and dynamic. We can think of the world of drug addicts or that of migrants, for example. Will the Family not benefit from this concentration of our efforts?

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## Reflection 6

### WHO IS JESUS FOR LOUISE DE MARILLAC?

#### Why the Incarnation?

Louise de Marillac liked to understand things clearly. She used to reflect on what could have led God to send his Son on earth. One sentence summarizes her thoughts on the reason behind the Incarnation: "God never showed greater love for His creatures than when He resolved to become Man" (*Spiritual Writings*, 700).

After Adam had rejected God in his life and wanted to make himself his own god, the Incarnation manifests the great consideration God has for humankind. God wants to renew contact with the sinner at the very depth of his suffering and restore his confidence in himself. He wishes him to understand clearly the dignity of his being made in the image and likeness of God. Louise de Marillac insists that this divine desire could be fulfilled only in total respect for the liberty of the person.

Each individual can respond to this grace or reject it as he or she decides. God does not predetermine human choices. Each person is free and thus has the full capacity to make a choice and to say yes or no to God's initiatives.

#### Accomplishment of the Incarnation

Louise de Marillac loved to imagine the Trinity conferring with one another, looking for a way to express all its love to humanity, and deciding together on the Incarnation of the Word: "As soon as human nature had sinned, the Creator, who wanted to repair this fault by a great act of pure love, ordered, in the Council of His Divinity, that one of the three Persons should become Man. By so doing, He gave proof of deep, true humility" (*Spiritual Writings*, 700).

The promise of the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity is inscribed in God's loving plan for the human race. For Louise, humility defines God every bit as much as does love. God is no longer the distant, demanding God, the All-Powerful One so often presented to the people.

The Incarnation itself would suffice to reveal this. However, many acts of the life of Jesus further confirm this. By His birth in a manger Jesus became "a child so as to be more accessible to His creatures"

(*Spiritual Writings*, 718). Louise reflected on “the humility Our Lord practiced at His Baptism” (*Spiritual Writings*, 719). And, while meditating on the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday evening, she exclaims, “Nothing should keep me from humbling myself. For this, I have the example of Our Lord” (*Spiritual Writings*, 715). Jesus had a legitimate interest in reminding His followers of their obligation to honor Him but He accepts to humble Himself to the point of “washing the feet of His Apostles” (*Spiritual Writings*, 719).

### Mary the Mother of Jesus

The Incarnation of the Son of God is real. The Word became flesh in the Virgin Mary. With great emotion and gratitude, Louise de Marillac contemplates the choice God made of Mary, a simple woman of Nazareth: “God had destined her as the mother of His Son” (*Spiritual Writings*, 735).

From personal experience, Louise knew what it meant to give life to a child, to provide it with the most intimate part of her being, her blood. She wanted to express the full extent of the happiness that filled her: “Blessed may you be forever, O my God, for the choice you made of the Holy Virgin!... You used the blood of the Blessed Virgin to form the body of your dear Son” (*Spiritual Writings*, 801).

All Mary’s glory comes from her divine maternity. Louise proclaims that Mary is the “masterpiece of God’s omnipotence in a nature that is purely human” (*Spiritual Writings*, 831). Is not praising Mary for the choice God made of her also glorifying God Himself? God so loved humankind that He wanted to come Himself into their midst by receiving His humanity from Mary.

### Holy Humanity of Christ

In 1652, Louise de Marillac wrote to the Sisters of Richelieu to remind them of the importance of contemplating the life of the Son of God during His stay on earth. There they will discover true charity: “Gentleness, cordiality, and forbearance must be the practices of the Daughters of Charity just as humility, simplicity and the love of the holy humanity of Jesus Christ, who is perfect charity, is their spirit. That, my dear Sisters, is a summary of what I think I should tell you about our Rules.” (*Spiritual Writings*, 406)

In her long letter of August 1655 to the Sisters who were in faraway Poland, Louise also stresses the importance of contemplating the human life of Christ: “...honor Jesus Christ by practicing the virtues which He, Himself, in His holy humanity taught us” (*Spiritual Writings*, 478).



The last letters of Louise return to this same theme. At Christmas 1659, she wrote to Geneviève Doinel: *"You invite me to go to the Crib so that I can meet you there near the Infant Jesus and His Holy Mother.... You will learn from Jesus, my dear Sisters, to practice solid virtue, as He did in His holy humanity, as soon as He came down upon earth. It is from the example of Jesus in His infancy that you will obtain all that you need to become true Christians and perfect Daughters of Charity"* (Spiritual Writings, 666).

Louise's emphasis on the contemplation of the humanity of Jesus Christ shows how greatly she desired the life of every Daughter of Charity to be a reflection of the countenance of Christ with its infinite goodness and its incommensurable love. Christ is truly the Rule of the Daughter of Charity as He is for the entire Vincentian family.

## Jesus Redeemer

Louise de Marillac, who had a solid theological formation, recognized that: *"The Incarnation of the Son of God was, in the eternal plan, for the redemption of the human race"* (Spiritual Writings, 830). The rupture between God and humanity brought about by sin could not go on forever. By sending His Son to earth, God wanted to renew the Alliance and allow humanity to find once again a meaning for its existence. For Louise de Marillac, the Redemption is a new creation, a re-creation which can take place only at the end of a long process of transformation, death, and resurgence of life.

Suffering humanity seems to Louise to be a prolongation of the suffering humanity of Christ. The service of love of every member of the Vincentian Family is a continuation of the Redemption, allowing each poor, humiliated, annihilated human being to live again, to resurrect, and to become a living person, freed from evil and sin, in a word, free. Louise's astonishing reflection echoes that of Saint Paul who dared to say: *"I now find my joy in the suffering I endure for you. I make up in my body what is lacking in the suffering of Christ in favor of His body, the Church"* (Col I, 24).

The Passion of the Son of God is so profound that Louise will insert it into the seal of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, *"The charity of Jesus Crucified urges us."* For Louise, this love must animate and enflame the heart of every Daughter of Charity for the service of those most in need. Louise often concludes her letters with a reference to this unheard of love manifested by Jesus on the Cross. She makes the words of Saint John in his first epistle her own: *"This is what love is: we have not first loved God, rather it is He who has loved us and who sent His Son as a victim of expiation for our*

sins. This is how we shall henceforth know love: Jesus has given His life for us, we also must give our lives for our brothers and sisters" (1 John 4:10-16).

## The Eucharist

The Eucharist is not limited in time to the life of Christ. When His Hour was approaching, Jesus found a way to prolong it in such a way that it is always with us. Louise de Marillac is in wonder before this the extraordinary event of the Eucharist: *"The Son of God took a human form.... Nevertheless, this did not satisfy His great love for us. He desired an inseparable union of divine nature with human nature. He accomplished this after the Incarnation by the admirable institution of the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar in which the fullness of the divinity dwells continually in the Second Person of the most Blessed Trinity"* (Spiritual Writings, 784).

It seemed to Louise that God wanted to constantly express His great love to humankind. The Incarnation already manifested this great desire for union. The Eucharist concretizes it in a yet greater way. Louise de Marillac does not stop at the aspect "memorial and sacrifice" of the Eucharist. Rather she speaks extensively of communion *"this admirable and, in a human sense, incomprehensible action"* (Spiritual Writings, 822).

To receive the Body of Christ is, according to Louise de Marillac, to become a participant in the life of God. Christ gives Himself as nourishment so that humans can draw new energy from it to accomplish their tasks on earth. In imitation of Christ, Christians are called to give themselves entirely if they want to bring life and love to their neighbor. The reception of communion brings exceptional strength because it confers on us *"the capacity to live in Him as He lives in us"* (Spiritual Writings, 823).

In response to such a gift from God, Louise desires for herself and for those she accompanies on their spiritual journey *"loving union"* (Spiritual Writings, 823). with God. Is it really possible for a human being to experience such a union with God? The period of thanksgiving after communion allows time to repeat to God all one's joy, all one's gratitude because Christ coming within us renders us like unto Him. Let us rejoice *"in contemplating this admirable invention and the loving union by which God, seeing Himself in us, makes us, once again like unto Him. This he does by communicating not only His grace but Himself"* (Spiritual Writings, 823). Louise de Marillac does not know how to thank her Lord and her God for having thus willed to remain on earth so that all persons might offer Him all the glory that His Holy Humanity already receives in heaven.



## Conclusion

Louise has a very clear and profound perception of Divine Love. Like the biblical writers, she recognizes that “*God is a devouring fire*” (Heb 12:26). In their daily lives, the sisters and all those who share the Vincentian charism are invited to allow this Divine Fire to fill their being and to welcome the plenitude of the love that the Spirit comes to spread in their hearts. It is in this relationship that they will find strength, energy, and creativity to accomplish their service of love with those who suffer from poverty in all its forms, long-standing and new.

Louise de Marillac recognizes that to follow Jesus and to serve Him in His suffering members means loving with an “*uncommon love*” (*Spiritual Writings*, 829), with a love that is strong, solid and unshaken by any difficulty. This strong love manifests itself concretely and on a daily basis by attentiveness to the individual, gentleness and kindness toward all. The more the Love of God grows, the more there is a consciousness of the dignity and liberty of each individual and the respect due to every person. This is how Christ expressed His Love.

## Questions for Personal and Group Reflection

1. What aspects of Jesus as presented by Louise de Marillac resonate in your heart?
2. How can we together deepen the Vincentian charism so that it permeate and direct our service?

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## Reflection 7

# SERVICE OF THE POOR. THE CONFRATERNITIES OF CHARITY: A FUNDAMENTAL INTUITION

One Sunday in August 1617 an event occurred which was to mark Saint Vincent's whole life. *"I was vesting to celebrate Holy Mass one Sunday when I was told that in an isolated house a quarter of a league away everyone was ill. None of them was able to help the others, and they were all in indescribable need. That touched me to the heart"* (CCD, IX, 192). During the sermon, Vincent shared his feelings with the people, who were very generous in going to the aid of the sick family. However, there was no organization, which gave Saint Vincent the idea of a Confraternity of Charity. This experience moved him to establish the "charity," to develop a spirituality of the Poor One and to broaden his pastoral vision.

It was in 1625 that the meeting occurred between Vincent, then a 45 year old priest who had discovered his mission of service and apostolate among the poor after a long interior crisis, and Louise de Marillac, a woman of 35 years who had in her life experienced a considerable amount of suffering. The one and the other, actually the one with the other, in their time were destined to be promoters of an extraordinary **culture of solidarity** enlightened by the Gospel.

### 1. Organized Charity

At Chatillon, Saint Vincent encountered a concrete situation that led him to find a solution responding to the needs expressed by the people. His reflection led him to go beyond the actual event in order to efficaciously lead and guide the generosity of his parishioners. His response flowed from a willingness to adapt and a desire for organization.

As soon as he grasped the situation at Chatillon he responded. He *"said that we were to run to the spiritual needs of our neighbor as to a fire"* (CCD, XI, 25 — report of Vincent's comments in chapter). In touch with the situation, he knew how to take the steps necessary to launch the project successfully. He got involved with what was happening and went immediately to the sick family, of whom he had spoken in the sermon, and brought them the consolation of

religion. There we have all the elements of adaptation: knowledge of the situation, interest in what was happening, communication, mobilization of a large number of people and personal commitment. The situation lacked one thing, organization, to which Vincent gave his best effort. *"Let us make haste slowly"* (CCD, V, 400) in Vincent's own words.

Today the AIC teams are made up of local volunteers responding to situations of actual poverty in the here and now. They welcome the people as they are, while seeking at the same time to go beyond their immediate expressed needs, because they know that the joys and sorrows in a person's life cannot be understood except in relation to a family or institutional context (history, work, education, culture). After a serious analysis of the situation of poverty, which takes into consideration the whole system, that is, the local social setting, and after a critical examination of the causes that have brought on this situation of vulnerability, the volunteers develop a written project which can be evaluated and regularly adapted to the evolving needs.

Action is not enough, however, if the action is not up to the level of the needs. For Saint Vincent it was necessary to organize in a way that aid would respond fully to the purpose for which it was given. At Chatillon he remarked that the poor *"...have sometimes suffered a great deal, more through a lack of organized assistance than from lack of charitable persons"* (CCD, XIIIb, 8). That is why he immediately called some women together to organize their assistance to the poor. The outcome was that he founded the Confraternity of Charity, wrote a rule and delegated tasks and responsibilities to the women of the parish whom he included in the process.

There were to be no more than twenty people in the Confraternity in order *"to avoid the confusion that comes from too large a number"* (CCD, XIIIb, 9). One person was to have the responsibility of directing the Confraternity, aided by two assistants, one of whom one was to be treasurer. The rules describe in minute detail the regularity of the visits to the poor and the way to carry them out. For Saint Vincent, good organization and the participation of everyone were the effective signs of true charity.

Vincent and Louise insisted that the services be carried out with competence. Both of them were profoundly engaged in the education and the formation of the poor. They foresaw that in working on the causes of exclusion it would be possible to help some come out from their precarious situations.

Today in serving others the AIC always works in teams. The team is a necessary structure for any permanent activity and is the key to



long-term continuity, humility and sharing competencies. Moreover, teamwork enables women in poverty to enter into a process of self-advancement and the development of their own community.

## 2. Efficacious and life-giving collaboration

Vincent's establishment of the Confraternities of Charity in 1617 was a great innovation. He gave responsibility to lay women and made them participants in public social activities through effective organization and corporate responsibility. Under his direction, Louise would play a capital role in the coordination and animation of these teams as well as in the spiritual education of their members by helping them to live their mission of solidarity in the light of the Gospel.

It can truly be said that in France (and subsequently in other countries) Vincent and Louise directed the attention of the public to the most destitute people and in the process gave birth to modern social institutions.

*"Go, therefore, Mademoiselle, go in the name of Our Lord. I pray that His Divine Goodness may accompany you, be your consolation along the way, your shade against the heat of the sun, your shelter in rain and cold, your soft bed in your weariness, your strength in your toil, and, finally, that He may bring you back in perfect health and filled with good works" (CCD, I, 64 f.).* With these words Vincent sent Louise on mission. She set out in May 1629 with the responsibility of visiting the Confraternities of Charity some of which were having difficulties.

In the course of her visits to the Confraternities of Charity, Louise began to sense that, in assisting the sick and the destitute, it would eventually be necessary to have persons entirely dedicated to them by vocation. In time, the Confraternities of Charity asked the assistance of the Daughters in order to guarantee the regularity of their ministry, for example, at the Hotel-Dieu.

The first major work of Louise was her role of visiting the Confraternities of the Ladies of Charity. Then, in addition to her attention to (new) foundations and the government of the houses, she was preoccupied with the spiritual education of the Daughters of Charity, watching over their instruction and forming them in charity: the poor person is Christ himself.

In 1638 Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac entered the battle against the social drama of their times, namely, children abandoned in the streets. They decided to appeal to the Ladies who obtained from the Queen a very large mansion. Louise set to work putting it in

good repair and gave her attention to teaching the Ladies and the Daughters how to alleviate the distress of the children.

Toward 1650 Vincent received a great sum of money as a gift, which he used to buy land and a house to serve as a hospice for 40 elderly people. It was the hospice of the Name of Jesus. It was a model and a breakthrough that proved that it was possible to part with the inhumane routine of the hospitals. Louise and her Daughters took care of running it.

Today as in the time of Vincent and Louise, working as part of a network is indispensable.

### 3. A Spirituality of the Poor

For Saint Vincent mission and charity always went hand in hand. *To go to the poor is to go toward Christ and to leave God for God.*

The poor person has a special place in the Church, since Christ willed to identify himself with the poor person throughout his own life. Vincent said, *"I must not judge a poor peasant man or woman by their appearance.... But turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who willed to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people"* (CCD, XI, 26). Meeting a poor person, **who is the icon of Christ**, ought to be done in a spirit of service and with the attitude of a servant. *"In serving persons who are poor, we serve Jesus Christ"* (CCD, IX, 199). That is why Saint Vincent insisted especially on the virtues of humility, simplicity and charity, which turn out to be the distinguishing characteristics of the Ladies and Daughters of Charity.

Today Benedict XVI has written: *"Jesus identifies himself with those in need, with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Mt 25:40). Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God"* (*Deus Caritas Est*, 15).

We have to take into account the deepest aspirations of the human person. Saint Vincent insisted that it is necessary *"to assist the poor spiritually and corporally,"* the poor are *"our lords and masters,"* and we have *"to adjust ourselves"* to them, wherever they are and whoever they are.

Today following the example of Saint Vincent, the systemic approach invites us to step back in order to approach people in their wholeness, that is, to grasp their history and culture as well as the nature and the quality of their relationships. Benedict XVI in the same vein directs human charitable activity toward the integral



human good: "...love does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls.... We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 28, 31a).

Saint Vincent considered poor people as persons with dignity and rights, to whom we owe justice and not pity. In helping the poor "we do (an act of) justice and not mercy;" "...there is scarcely any (act of) charity that is not accompanied by justice." For Saint Vincent "alms" to the most destitute was only a temporary solution. Only work can give back to men and women in difficulty their dignity and their place in society.

Today we continue to believe in the dignity of the poor, to believe they have rights and duties and to believe firmly in the capacity of each one to improve their situation and to go forward. This is why the volunteers establish personal relations with the poorest, and accompany them in the process of assuming personal responsibility, with a view to finding their own place in society. Charitable action looks towards "...a true humanism, which acknowledges that the human person is made in the image of God and wants to help him or her to live in a way consonant with that dignity" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 30).

#### 4. An Expanded Pastoral Vision

At Châtillon Saint Vincent discovered another dimension of the Church, namely that all the faithful have their own proper responsibility and their own sphere of activity.

Saint Vincent, after his appeal from the pulpit on behalf of the sick poor of whom he spoke, was very impressed by the response and the generosity of the parishioners — "I met the ladies returning in droves" (CCD, IX, 166). He understood that ordinary Christians, if they are motivated according to circumstances know how to become seriously and efficaciously involved in the activities proposed to them. To him it was a revelation about the important place of lay people in the Church. He saw the service of the poor as a state of charity (see CCD, VII, 396 f. and IX, 538), a place of sanctification and a confirmation of the quality of the lives of baptized persons.

Today Benedict XVI has written: *The Christian's program — the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus — is "a heart which sees."* This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly (*Deus Caritas Est*, 31b). "All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action. This is so first of all in the sense that... we work

towards a brighter and more humane world so as to open doors into the future" (Spe Salvi, 35).

John Paul II in Paris on 31 May 1980 addressing those in the lay apostolate said, *"The Church, and the Pope in its name, counts on your apostolate as lay people. The work that is properly yours in the Church is essential. No one can replace you in it, not the priests, not the religious."*

Saint Vincent knew how to value the quality of the service of women. He wrote in 1650, *"And I can give this testimony in favor of women, that there is no fault to be found in their administration because they are so careful and trustworthy"* (CCD, IV, 76). His charitable works could only have developed through the dedication of women in each locale. In 1657 he declared to the Ladies of Charity: *"For eight hundred years or so, women have had no public role in the Church; in the past there were some called Deaconesses.... About the time of Charlemagne, however, by a discreet working of Divine Providence, this practice came to an end; persons of your sex were deprived of any role and have not had any since then. And now that same Providence is turning today to some of you to supply what was lacking to the sick poor of the Hotel-Dieu"* (CCD, XIIIb, 432). He, consequently, did not hesitate to ask the women he encountered to embrace the active role that was returning to them in the Church. In this way the Ladies and after them the Daughters, under the direction of Louise de Marillac, were to continue the intuition of their common Founder through the complementarity of their vocation and their service.

Today 71 percent of vulnerable and at risk people in the world are women, so it is evident that an international NGO like the AIC made up of volunteer women who can be the voice of women without a voice has great importance.

John Paul affirmed the special role of women, when he said: *"Every human being is entrusted to each and every other human being, but in a special way the human being is entrusted to woman, precisely because the woman in virtue of her special experience of motherhood is seen to have a specific sensitivity towards the human person and all that constitutes the individual's true welfare, beginning with the fundamental value of life."* Also, he indicated a second task, *"...women have the task of assuring the moral dimension of culture, the dimension, namely of a culture worthy of the person, of an individual yet social life"* (Christifideles Laici – The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, December 30, 1988, n. 51).

Saint Vincent knew how to network with people. He brought together rich and poor, clergy and lay, men and women. He knew collaboration was the key to success in the service of the poor.



Thus, he created bonds, established bridges, and promoted unity among persons of all social classes without distinction. He was the advocate of the poor before the highest authorities, whether it was Cardinal Richelieu in promoting peace, Anne of Austria in taking responsibility as a member of the Council of Conscience or Monsieur de Gondi in improving the lot of the galley slaves. He knew how to denounce injustice, oppression and extreme poverty to the point of impacting structures. Our love, Saint Vincent said, should be "affective and effective."

Today we are aware that sin affects not only individuals, but profoundly affects social structures, is embodied in unjust laws, economic relations based on power, artificial frontiers and boundaries... all the unjust structures which maintain the poor in their poverty.

*May each woman and each man in the Vincentian Family take advantage of this jubilee year in order to radiate to the world Saint Vincent and Saint Louise's love for the poorest of the poor. Each one in his or her own situation, for example, might celebrate publicly this love for the least by a shared meal or some other manifestation of conviviality, so that the world might know this Love is alive!*

### Questions for sharing

1. People living on the margins and at risk change and live in a society that is constantly changing. How can we adjust our activities to this reality? What can we do to work on the unjust conditions that have brought about these situations of poverty?
2. What networks can we establish with the poor among the donors, the churches, the governments, the private sector, the unions, the media, and international organizations? Do we have the courage and the strength to be involved in society so we are able to denounce these structures of sin and work to change laws and transform public opinion through political action?
3. How are we to organize ourselves, like Louise, to engage the volunteers, study, reform, improve and organize charity so that it responds to the demands of our times?

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## Reflection 8

### EVANGELIZATION OF THE POOR

Already in the conference to the missionaries on the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission, December 6, 1658, Saint Vincent clearly stated that the evangelization of the poor involves both material and spiritual assistance:

*"Was not that what Our Lord and many great saints did, and they not only recommended poor persons to others, but they themselves consoled, comforted, and healed them? Are not those who are poor the afflicted members of Our Lord? Are not they our brothers and sisters?... So then, if there are any among us who think they are... to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others.... To do that is to preach the Gospel by words and by works, and that is the most perfect way; it is also what Our Lord did, and what those should do who represent Him on earth" (CCD, XII, 77-78).*

Behold the purpose of our existence. We exist to continue the work of the Son of God (cf. CED, XI, 108). The poor who are our Lords and Masters are our reason for existence (cf. CED, IX, 125, 211 and 214). We all form part of a large family, the Christian family and more specifically the Vincentian Family. We see from the beginning that someone guides our vocation: Jesus Christ is the rule of the Mission of Saint Vincent de Paul (cf. CED, XII, 130) and of his sons and daughters.

Not long ago the Church called us to celebrate the Pauline Year. The Vincentian Family had the occasion to take the words of this great Apostle as a model: *"I have become all things to all, so that I might save some"* (1 Cor 9:22). We follow the example of Christ who in his humility did not hold on to his divine condition but became one of us so that he might raise us up to God (cf. Eph 2:6-9).

It is important that we not lose sight of the fact that we are continuators of the mission of Jesus Christ. The mission of evangelization is proper to the Son of God (cf. Luke 4:18) and to all his disciples (cf. Mt 15:16). We must know Christ well in order to be able to announce him, because our mission is not to announce ourselves, but to announce his person and his message. Whoever proceeds in this manner will be able to rejoice in repeating: *"I have to*

*announce the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, because this is why I have been sent*" (Luke 4:43). To be faithful to the mandate of the Son of God is to be faithful to the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The new situations of poverty invite the Vincentian Family to take effective action in its pastoral ministries. The past serves as a lesson for the present and a stimulus for the future.

## TO EVANGELIZE WITH WORDS AND WORKS

### Yesterday

The evangelization of the poor is not a *discovery* but an *event* that has to be interpreted in the light of the Scriptures, the Tradition and the lives of the saints. What did Vincent have in mind shortly after his ordination to the priesthood? He was thinking of money and his family's wellbeing as well as his own. But the events of Folleville and Chatillon-les-Dombes interpreted in the light of the Gospel changed his life and set him on the road to holiness. Little by little with the help of the Holy Spirit, he became a saint.

Evangelization of the poor knows no limits or boundaries in the same way charity is inventive to infinity (cf. *CED* XI, 142-148). The Vincentian Family is spread around the world in cities, towns and villages where people often do not have a profound knowledge of Christ. Saint Vincent said to his confreres, "*How happy is the Missionary who has no limit in this world on where he can go to preach the Gospel. Why then do we hesitate and set limits, since God has given us the whole world to satisfy our zeal?*" (Abelly, II, 84). It is our ongoing task. We also have to hand it on faithfully to future missionaries in the same way Christ did in forming his twelve missionaries, the Apostles, through Word, life and works (Abelly, II, 191).

Saint Vincent sent his missionaries not only to preach missions but also to help the poor in their spiritual and material needs. At the funeral oration preached in the church of Saint Germain d'Auxerrois on 23 November 1660, Bishop Henry de Maupas said that the assistance given by Saint Vincent consisted precisely in giving spiritual and material help to the poor at no cost to them. The hand of God chose Saint Vincent to take the "tablets of the law" to his people, and with admirable zeal he sanctified thousands of souls by means of the missions. He procured spiritual help for the provinces completely ruined by the disaster of war. He saved thousands from the jaws of death and liberated unfortunate souls from final shipwreck.



The key idea of Saint Vincent was to **build** all his works on the foundation of the example of Jesus Christ.

1. *To be always conformed to Jesus Christ in thought and intention:*

*"The intention of the Company is to imitate Our Lord to the extent that poor, insignificant persons can do. What **does** that mean? It means that the Company aspires to take Him as a **model** in the way He acted, what He did, His ministries, and His aims. How can one person represent another, if he does not have the same **characteristics**, features, manners, and looks? That cannot be. So, if we are determined to make ourselves like this divine model, and feel in **our** hearts this desire and holy affection, it is necessary, I repeat, it is necessary to strive to model our thoughts, works, and intentions on His... **so** that what we do or do not do is based on this principle (CCD, XII, 67-68).*

2. *To be conformed to Jesus Christ Evangelizer of the poor by making the Gospel effective:*

*"First, the Son of God could have been asked, 'Why have You come? It is to evangelize the poor. That is My Father's order....' we can say that coming to evangelize the poor does not simply mean to teach them the mysteries necessary for their salvation, **but** also to do what was foretold and prefigured by the prophets to **make** the Gospel effective" (CCD, XII, 75).*

To make the Gospel effective means **to** avoid every kind of ideology, every automatic repetition of the **word** of God, any dehumanization of the mystery of the Son. To **evangelize** means to put the Gospel into practice, that is, to believe in Jesus Christ, to live in Jesus Christ, to follow Jesus Christ. The Holy One said words do not suffice, works are necessary. In order to believe and live what we preach, it is necessary to act, to serve, **to** go forth to meet the neighbor in his or her needs.

3. *To evangelize means to assist the poor in every way, spiritual and material:*

*"...if there are any among us who think **they** are in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal **ones**, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every **way**, by us and by others, if we want to hear those pleasing words of **the** Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, 'Come, beloved of my **Father**; possess the kingdom that has been prepared for you, because I **was** hungry and you gave me to eat; I was naked and you clothed me; **sick** and you assisted me'" (Mt 25:34-36) (CCD, XII, 77).*

The central idea is that the missionaries imitate and continue the mission of Jesus Christ who evangelized, announced the Gospel, proclaimed the Good News of salvation. To do this is to evangelize with the Word and with works; it is the most perfect; and it is what our Lord practiced and what all those who represent him on earth are held to practice (CED, XII, 73-94).

Consequently, we are able to affirm that the missionary way of Saint Vincent in evangelizing the poor was:

1. See. Be a good observer by seeing how society treats the poor and paying attention to the conditions of their lives. **Christ in the poor.**
2. Judge. Think how these conditions might change, asking ourselves why and what are possible projects. **Christ for the poor.**
3. Be compassionate. Have compassion for our brothers and sisters, uniting ourselves with them where they are. **Christ with the poor.**
4. Act. Put our hands to work, being Good Samaritans and healing the wounds of the people. **Christ loves the poor.**

## Today

The evangelization of the poor today in a globalized world is an enormous challenge. The phenomenon of the "leftover masses" those who, according to some, are not needed in this world and who experience exclusion, discrimination and many other challenges of post-modernity, not to mention the harmful effects of the current financial and economic crisis, constitute the new call in the evangelization of the poor.

My experience of God, necessary for evangelization, came through the prism of my personal pastoral experience in Africa. My experience as military chaplain in Portugal and my seven years in Mozambique have been invaluable in helping me live and feel that the words of Saint Paul "*I became all things to all so that I might save at least some*" (I Cor 9:22) are necessary for achieving any success in the evangelization of the poor. The poor ask us to be men and women of God. They ask us to have a coherent lifestyle, to mediate the presence of God and to be faithful to Christ who is the rule of the mission.

1. *The experience of God — The "ministerial" Church in Africa/ Mozambique — The poor evangelizing the poor:*

The evangelization of the poor in order to be efficacious ought to be by the poor themselves. For our part, we ought to organize them, form them, and help them to establish small base or nuclear



communities, where everyone can know, help and love one another. We ought to draw them to Christ by means of the power of God's love that motivates us to serve them, and to support them with the Word of God, but also with micro-credit, with small income-producing projects, with opportunities to get out of their surrounding poverty by themselves.

The ministerial church of small communities that are so alive in Mozambique is the fruit of the persecution that the church underwent, which led to the departure and death of many missionaries. As a result, the church had to seek new ways of evangelization by relying more and more on lay people. The war of independence of Mozambique (1964-1975) brought about independence from the former Portuguese colony in 1975 and with it the clerical church of colonial times "disappeared." With the departure of a large number of the missionaries, the Marxist-Leninist regime persecuted and controlled the few who remained along with the Mozambican diocesan clergy. Many of the private health and education facilities belonged to the Christian churches, principally to the Catholic Church. The nationalization of these along with the official socialist "antireligious" propaganda created a climate of hostility between the Christians and the state. Then there came the well-known "war of 16 years" or "the civil war" which was an armed conflict from 1976 to 1992. In this context, the church in 1977 and again in 1991 held National Pastoral Assemblies and out of necessity decided to create the *ministerial church*, a church of small communities and ministers, and began to build up the local church.

In this *ministerial church*, neighbors who seek to do good gather in nuclear or small communities, in which everyone has a ministry and a function that serves others. Everyone knows everyone else, they visit each other, they help each other, they feel they belong together and they celebrate their faith with vitality, rhythm and contagious joy. They are all one family. In this situation, the parish is the community of communities. It is the place where these nuclear communities come together and where they, at the same time, give life to (animate) their celebrations and live the sacraments. The way they have chosen to the future is through a return to the spirit of the first community in Jerusalem, where *"...they devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.... Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart..."* (Acts 2:42.46). They had no one in need among them. This is only possible when everyone belongs to a small or nuclear community.



Ongoing evangelization has to enter into the hearts of the people so that they feel loved by God and experience themselves as agents of their own material and spiritual salvation. Then they will believe God is good, merciful and just. If our preaching of the Word of God touches only the surface of their lives, then, when the difficulties and afflictions of life arrive, they will have recourse to their gods, to the wizards, to the spirits... whom the Gospel will never have replaced in their heart of hearts.

*2. The experience of God — The evangelization of the poor happens through the incarnation and adaptation of the missionary:*

The evangelization of the poor happens through the incarnation and adaptation of the missionary to the reality and surroundings of the mission. This is the only way to touch the lives of many and convert some. At the end of 1999 when I was a military chaplain at the parachute school for the green berets in Portugal, I had an experience that taught me the meaning of this incarnation, enabling me to enter into the hearts of these children of God, the green berets.

After I received my brown beret, which is common and a person can get without a drop of sweat, I began to organize pastoral and religious activities. With the support of some of the officials, I organized celebrations and meetings in preparation for some of the sacraments... but the results were catastrophic. I asked myself why, but got nowhere. Then I began to notice that practically everyone else was wearing a green beret and that the few of us who wore brown berets received little respect. The commander used to urge me strongly to take the parachute-training course with the soldiers, in order to win them over, to become one of them, to understand them, to be accepted by them and to belong to their big family — to merit a green beret. I thought a thousand times about his invitation, as I tried to digest my pastoral frustration. Eventually, looking inside myself, longing to stay in that military unit and thinking about my Vincentian missionary vocation, I finally decided to begin training to prove myself to the troops. In two months, I was able to get into the course and upon graduation, I earned a green beret, for which I had suffered plenty. They gave me many chances to quit, but the power of apostolic zeal was more powerful than my inclination to quit. With the green beret on my head, the results of my pastoral ministry changed completely. I was one of them! I understood the message of Saint Paul, “I became all things to all, so that I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22).

As Saint Vincent said to us, the great motive in our apostolate is the knowledge that the Son of God’s work from beginning to end was evangelization and that he uses us as his instruments to do the same.



We are confident that he sustains us, because he has called us, gathered us and sent us (Abelly, III, 10) and in his providence accompanies us (Abelly, III, 10). *"Give me a man of prayer and he will be able to do anything; he can say with the holy Apostle, 'I can do all things in him who sustains and comforts me'"* [Phil 4:13] (CCD XI, 76; Abelly, III, Chapter 7).

1. What does "to evangelize the poor" mean to us in the Vincentian Family as we celebrate the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the deaths of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise?
2. What powerful experiences of evangelizing the poor do you have in your own situation, and how do these experiences help you understand and develop missionary activity that is contemporary, dynamic and faithful to the Vincentian charism?

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## Reflection 9

# POVERTY IN THE WORLD. THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF POVERTY

### 1. Two Unequal Worlds

To speak of poverty in the world is to speak of social exclusion. The world, in its material aspect (welfare state), is divided in two big blocks. The first is composed of countries that possess the lowest Social Exclusion Index. It is concentrated in Europe, the historical center of the expansion of capitalism, and includes Japan, the United States and Canada, countries of later industrialization but which instituted the agrarian reform and developed politics oriented towards the defense of national product. They are, therefore, the 28 countries with the lowest index of social exclusion. Four of these countries are in Eastern Europe and are the new members of the European Union (Lithuania, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic). This reveals the contribution of some socialist regimes to the improvement of the indexes of quality of life and of social inclusion. These 28 countries represent 14.4% of the world population and share 52.1% of the global revenue that is generated annually. The average per capita revenue of these countries is around US\$ 26,900 taking into consideration the criterion of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).

Next come 60 countries with elevated social exclusion. They constitute 35.5% of the world population and share 11.1% of the revenue produced in the world. They have an average per capita revenue of US\$ 2,300 taking into account the criterion of Purchasing Power Parity. Of these 60 countries, 44 are in Africa and in Oceania, partitioned territorially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Europeans pursuing their interests. There are 10 countries in Asia that were submitted to different forms of formal and informal occupation, 6 countries in Latin America, where political dependency, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, did not always mean a real economic, financial and political autonomy. One has also to underline that 80% of the African population live in countries placed in the extreme zone of social exclusion, compared to 37% in Asia, 19% in Oceania and 7% in Latin America.

## 2. Who are the Excluded?

### *Material Poverty*

The countries that present the worst Social Exclusion Index, in great majority, are victims of poverty, inequality, low schooling, illiteracy, lack generalized access to health and suffer instability in the labor market. They are the countries that suffer even the consequences of the old social exclusion such as low income and high illiteracy, as well as the marks of the new social exclusion like unemployment, inequality of income, low third-level education and violence.

### *Political Poverty*

In addition to material poverty there exists a more acute form, that of political poverty. The concept of political poverty emerged in the context of social politics, in particular in the struggle against poverty. Today it is used widely in the descriptions of human development of the UN/PNUD, especially since 1997. It points out that poverty cannot be reduced to material deprivation, important that it always is, because poverty is fundamentally a phenomenon of political exclusion.

To be a poor person is less than not to have, less than not to be. To experience hunger is misery indeed, but even greater misery is not knowing that, first, hunger is invented and imposed, and, second, that, to overcome hunger, it is not enough to have a meal, but one has to be in a condition to procure for oneself one's proper sustenance.

With this, ignorance is considered to be the center of poverty. A poor person is, above all, one who does not know or who is prevented from knowing that he is poor. Irremediably poor is the person who does not even know that he is poor. He lacks critical awareness, first, to "read" his reality and, later, to confront it within an alternative political project. Because he lacks this critical awareness, he fails to become a subject, master of his own history and, therefore, he just waits for a solution from others. The system takes advantage of this circumstance to maintain him as a "manipulated mass," treating him as beneficiary rather than as a citizen.

A person is prevented from becoming a master of his history. Poverty, therefore, does not only imply being deprived of material goods, but, especially, being prevented from building one's own opportunities, from taking one's destiny in one's own hands. When one speaks of ignorance, however, we do not express what every educator knows does not exist, that is, every human being is



hermeneutically and culturally determined, he develops his proper culture and shared knowledge, he maintains the legacies of history and multiple identities. Rather, we point out that ignorance is historically produced, maintained and perpetuated.

### 3. The Poor as Subjects

The politics adopted by the World Bank does not satisfy the expectations of growth. When one measures the growth of a concrete population what is taken into consideration is the economic growth in a big scale. When the Gross National Product (GNP) is observed to be growing in a particular country or region, it is taken to mean that the goal of eradicating poverty has been met.

That leads us to raise the following observations. First, the growth of the GNP is painfully slow and it can happen without in any way benefiting the poor. Second, when this happens, this growth can even be realized at the cost of the poor. Consequently, in this conception of growth, the poor are considered or seen as objects; they cease to recognize their enormous potential, particularly those of women and children. In many situations, the authorities do not see them as independent agents and protagonists of their own development.

We know that the human being, within given structures, is capable of making interventions in those structures and in themselves, opening proper spaces for action; to a certain extent, he creates his own individual and collective history. The human being is capable of unheard-of conquests that defy limits in every respect; he is capable of building his own autonomy.

### 4. The Attitude of Saint Vincent de Paul

Many forms of poverty in the times of Saint Vincent de Paul, similar to today's, were the result of the ambitious politics of governments. In the France of his time, Vincent de Paul accomplished a work effective of eradicating poverty. He set many forms of service to change the miserable conditions of the poor. He organized the Priests of the Mission aimed at the evangelization and service of the poor; with Louise de Marillac he gathered the Daughters of the Charity for the direct work with the abandoned; he founded the Volunteers of the Charity to visit the poor and the sick in their own homes; he invested in the conscientization and formation of the clergy in order for them to take the side of the poor, founding seminaries, promoting the Tuesday Conferences, sensitizing them with the needs of the Retired; he organized hospitals, houses of

welcome for children, adolescents and patients; he established works that absorbed the children of the street, the abandoned children, the children who had neither house, family, meal, nor any type of protection.

His struggle in life was always to provide food to the hungry and to promote the dignity of the poor. No hungry person was indifferent for him; on the contrary, he showed indignation over the multitude of the hungry that hovered in the streets. He worked at the galleys where the prisoners were condemned to work as rowers. He succored the victims of war, pestilence and famine. One can affirm that Vincent de Paul accomplished the project "famine zero" in Lorraine, Champagne and Picardy, regions then devastated by war and famine.

From San Quentin in 1652, a Priest of the Mission writes to Vincent: "The famine here is so bad that we see men eating dirt, chewing on grass, stripping the bark off the trees, and tearing up and swallowing the miserable rags that cover them. But what is horrifying — and what we would not dare to mention if we had not seen it — is that they are devouring their own arms and hands and are dying in this state of despair."

From the letters sent by the Priests of the Mission to Saint Vincent one finds stories of the consequences of the devastation of the War of the Fronde. They narrate: "We have just visited 35 villages of the deanery of Guise where we found about 600 persons, whose misery is so great, that they take dogs and dead horses, after the wolves have satisfied their famine on them. Just in Guise there are more than 500 patients taking refuge in holes and in caverns, places that are fit for animals rather than for human persons."

## 5. A Vincentian Attitude

The Vincentian Family, persons and groups of persons closely linked to the charism and to the spirituality transmitted by Vincent de Paul, begins to reconfigure its work with the poor. It endeavors to return to the sources. The theme "Promotion of Systemic Change – Strategy to Help the Poor out of Poverty" is a system with precise diagnosis. 350 years after the death of Vincent de Paul, we are re-discovering what was evident to him. We begin to rediscover the wise educational maxim that Vincent de Paul used working with the poor: dedication and service to them by assisting them materially and spiritually.

To help the poor out of material poverty implies helping them out of political poverty. One who is politically poor is not a true



citizen because he does not have the capacity of organization and, consequently, the power to introduce changes either for himself or for the group of which he is a part.

### *Insertion and commitment*

For Vincent de Paul, one needs to know the reality of the poor person, to see his material conditions and to understand his situation as a human being. Vincent was always attentive to the respect of the person in the work with the poor. Vincentian work is to promote systemic changes in the life of those excluded, according them dignity and abundant life in all its human dimensions: "If there are any among us who think they are in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others, if we want to hear those pleasing words of the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead: 'Come, beloved of my Father; possess the kingdom that has been prepared for you, because I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you assisted me.' To do that is to preach the Gospel by words and by works, and that is the most perfect way; it is also what Our Lord did, and what those should do who represent him on earth."

We would like to suggest that Vincentian work at present cannot address only the disastrous consequences that compromise the life of the poor, but also and principally, their causes.

More than ever, in the Vincentian work, one needs to articulate strategies for change issuing from politicization that leads the poor to:

- Leave the historical process of ignorance. On the one hand, to give him the necessary tools so that he recognizes that he is living in poverty and, on the other hand, that he is himself suppressed to know that he is poor;
- Cease being a mass and object of manipulation into becoming a subject of his own dignity;
- Become a citizen who organizes himself politically and which renders him capable of instituting significant changes in his life and in the life of the community;
- Gain awareness of his rights and construct the basic program of his own liberation.

350 years after the death of Vincent de Paul we are invited to make a qualitative leap in Vincentian work.

*From the thought of Vincente de Paul*

"To evangelize the poor does not simply mean to teach them the mysteries necessary for their salvation, but also to do what was foretold and prefigured by the prophets to make the Gospel effective.... Let the priests devote themselves to the care of the poor. Was that not what Our Lord and many great saints did, and they not only recommended poor persons to others, but they themselves consoled, comforted and healed them? Are they not they our brothers and sisters?... If there are any among us who think they are in the Mission to evangelize poor people but not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others, if we want to hear those pleasing words of the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead: 'Come, beloved of my Father; possess the kingdom that has been prepared for you, because I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you assisted me.' To do that is to preach the Gospel by words and by works, and that is the most perfect way; it is also what Our Lord did, and what those should do who represent him on earth.... This is what should cause us to prefer this to all other states and works on earth and to consider ourselves happier for it."

*Guide Questions*

1. For you, who are the excluded ones in society?
2. How do we make our works with the poor effective?
3. How does the content of this reflection affect the members of the Vincentian Family in their prayer, formation, and concrete projects of service for the poor?

Written by

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Translation: MARCELO MANIMTIM VICTORIO, C.M., Province of the Philippines



## Reflection 10

# CELEBRATING SAINT VINCENT AND SAINT LOUISE WITH POOR PEOPLE

Can you imagine a celebration of the Anniversary of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac without the poor? They are the saints of Charity. He is referred to as the "Father of the Poor" and the "Apostle of Charity". She is the patron saint of social workers. Their lives were totally consumed in serving the poor. So, of course the poor must be included in the celebration.

Yet, most of the people served by the Vincentian family do not know St. Vincent and St. Louise. Why, because most of us in the Vincentian Family seldom take the time to tell those we visit in their homes or hospital beds or wherever we serve them about our founders. We live out the charism as we serve but we do not tell people why we do what we do. This year, especially this year of celebration, we need to tell people stories of our founders. In fact this year is the perfect time to announce to the people we serve that we do what we do because of St. Vincent and St. Louise. They are our heroes, our role models. We need to tell them so that they too may be graced with the reality of Vincentian Spirituality and the Vincentian charism.

Among the many great spiritual men and women of history, there may be for each of us a few or maybe just one or two who speak the language of our hearts and give us inspiration. These are our spiritual guides. We Vincentians have found our guides to be Vincent and Louise. Are they not also perfect guides for the poor? Their spirituality is as relevant today as when they journeyed through life in the seventeenth century. They are the ones who speak the language of our hearts and give us direction. We must tell their stories and share their wisdom with all those we serve.

St. Vincent said "It is our vocation... to set people's hearts ablaze, to do what the Son of God did, who came to light a fire on earth in order to set it aflame with his love. It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love him. I must love my neighbor as the image of God and the object of his love.... I must act in such a way that people love their creator and each other in mutual charity for the love of God who loved them so much that he delivered up his own Son to death for them." What better way is there to lead hearts to God than to use the example of St. Vincent and St. Louise?

They lived out to perfection the call to lead hearts to God. So, again this is the perfect time to tell their stories. It is the perfect time to make this a priority in the Vincentian Family.

St. Louise said, "More is required of us than to go, to come, and to give. Our intentions should be pure and thoroughly devoid of self interest." Most of us members of the Vincentian Family come and go in a hurry as we serve. There is so much to do and so many more to visit. We rush through our work of service instead of focusing on each person totally. How beautiful it is when we do take time to really visit with open hearts and minds free of distractions and the compulsion to move on to another person or matter. That is when we see the face of Christ. So, rather than coming and going and being concerned about matters of self interest, we should visit with the poor and share, especially the stories of our founders and how they encourage us to do what we do.

### Why We Do What We Do

People who are poor must wonder what makes us "tick". One Daughter of Charity at a clinic in India who changed a filthy bandage and cleaned the infected wound of a woman with leprosy was asked this question by the grateful woman. "Sister, how can you do this work?" Sister responded, "Our founders taught us." She went on to explain that St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac instructed the Daughters of Charity that Jesus Christ is in the person of those who are poor. "They are our lords and our masters." The woman was amazed and honored.

Most members of the Vincentian Family "come and go." We listen. We act. We serve. We talk about God. We pray with those we visit. We do much. But, most of us do not tell people why we do what we do. We do not tell them about the charism of our founders. And, we do not tell them that is what it is that inspires us to serve others.

As we have been taught by our current Vincentian mentors, we must "First Do and Then Teach." They tell us that St. Vincent instructed us to do this in all our service to the poor. So, after we provide the service for which we have been called to provide, we have the ideal opportunity to share information about St. Vincent and St. Louise our models. The woman treated by the Sister who asked why she did what she did could easily understand what Sister was saying because she witnessed service first. Each home visit made by a member of the Vincentian Family requires service first. That is what we do. We listen to the needs. We bring food. We help with rent. We get clothing. We treat the sick. Most recently we have looked for



systemic change responses so as to join with people in lifting themselves out of poverty. In all that the poor present to us, we respond. Now, let us make a concerted effort to give also the precious gift of the Vincentian Charism.

## Let Us Be Formed

Many of us lay members of the Vincentian Family joined our particular branch of the Family to help the poor but we did not fully understand why we were doing what they did. We just wanted to help the poor. We did not realize we were serving "Our Lords and Masters." We did not look at the face of Jesus Christ when we sat with a struggling mother of three children. We did not know about "leaving God for God." Now, thanks to recent formation efforts in the Vincentian Family, most of us do know the basics of Vincentian Spirituality. However, if we wish to open the doors of the Vincentian Charism widely and invite the poor to join in the celebration of the Vincentian Family, we need to be prepared to teach.

So, this year is also the perfect time for each of us to study and reflect on the lives and words of St. Vincent and St. Louise for our own spiritual growth and to be able to share this wisdom with others, especially the people we serve. To do so we need to believe in and understand the Vincentian Charism so strongly that we can not hold back from telling all those we serve about it and to give witness to it. The poor must see St. Vincent and St. Louise in each of us. Frederic Ozanam observed that "A patron saint should not be a mere signboard to a society, like St. Denis or St. Nicholas over the door of a tavern. A patron saint should be regarded as a type on which we should try to pattern ourselves as he (St. Vincent de Paul and she St. Louise de Marillac) patterned himself on the Divine Type which is Jesus Christ" (J.P. DERUM, *Apostle in a Top Hat*, p. 112).

## The Perfect Year

This anniversary year is the perfect time to share the news of the Charism with our "Lords and Masters" and to invite them to celebrate with all Vincentians. St. Vincent said "we should not be doing enough for God and our neighbor if we supplied the sick poor only with nourishment and medicine and if we did not assist them... with the spiritual services we owe them." One of the most special services we can give is to teach a person to be like or in fact become the Jesus of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac. That is to follow Christ the Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor. How do we do this? Consider these thoughts:

**Share the Charism with the Poor.** While visiting with each person or family, take an extra few minutes to tell the story of St. Vincent and St. Louise and the Vincentian Family. Talk about the lives, beliefs and actions of the Saints.

**Prepare Handouts.** Within your local Vincentian Family branch (conference, association or group) develop simple written materials for distribution to the people you serve. This could be like a holy card, a flier or a pamphlet that tells the story of the Founders.

**Have a Celebration Locally and Invite the Poor.** Plan a gathering to celebrate the feast of St. Louise and/or another one to celebrate the feast of St. Vincent. Invite the other branches of the Family and all those served. Have a simple meal and tell the stories with short presentations, skits or audio visual materials.

**Invite People Who Are Poor To Become Members of the Family.** Ask those you serve, where appropriate as with any other friend, if they may be interested in becoming a member of your conference, association or group. Invite them to a meeting for the purpose of discernment.

**Initiate a Vincentian Project.** Is there a need in your community that needs attention? Bring people together from the community to discuss the concern. Involve the poor, women and men and the young at all stages: identification, planning, implementation and evaluation. Consider a Systemic Change Project. Read "Seeds of Hope-Stories of Systemic Change."

## Extend the Vincentian Family

What better way is there to celebrate the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Deaths of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac than to open wide the doors of the Vincentian Family to all, especially people who are poor? The Saints would have it no other way than to include "Our Lords and Masters." If we do this it will be a celebration second to none.

This is the most perfect year to reach out to the Family, all branches and the poor. At a Vincentian Family Gathering in Cameroon, Africa in July, 2009, an African story was told that conveys the desire of God that all men and women may all be one in solidarity with each other. The story is:

There was a cloud, a big beautiful cloud. In the cloud were many rain drops. Each had a name. There was Dignity, Hope and Friendship. There was Gentleness, Simplicity and Humility. There were many more with equally beautiful names.



And, there was Exclusion. Exclusion was a miserable individual. He was arrogant, self-centered, impatient and proud. God said to all the rain drops "We must wait for just the right moment to rain down on the earth. I will tell you." However, Exclusion said "I will not wait. I want attention. I want recognition. I want to do something that will be noticed." So, he left the cloud and dropped to earth. Plop! Nothing happened. Finally, God said to the other rain drops "It's time! It's time to rain down on earth." So, all the rain drops jumped from the cloud and showered the earth. There was a loud noise, like an explosion. This was followed by cries of joy and happiness. There was love all around. The people lived happily ever after in solidarity with each other and they gave glory to God.

May the Vincentian Family grow in numbers and in love this Anniversary Year. May "exclusion" stay away. God bless our efforts with and for the poor.

### Question for reflection

How can we share the story of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise with the poor people whom we serve?

Written by

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## Reflection 11

# THE WAYS THE CHARISM OF SAINT VINCENT AND SAINT LOUISE IS LIVED IN THE VARIOUS BRANCHES OF THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY

### Introduction

A charism is alive and relevant when through time it is accepted and adopted by many people. In the 350 years since the death of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, the "Vincentian charism" has proven to be this kind of charism as it inspired numerous followers through these years. To this day it continues to be embraced, adopted and lived by numerous groups, associations, institutes and movements. Its vitality and relevance to our times is shown in various ways: in the profound consciousness of being a Family sharing a charism; in the projects and programs that address the multiple needs of today's poor; in the pastoral approach that emphasizes solidarity, collaboration and partnership; and in the continued reflection on its distinctive spiritual moorings.

### A Family Sharing a Charism

Living a charism starts with a deep consciousness and appreciation of its meaning and importance. Urged on by Vatican II's call on religious groups to return to their original charism and mission, the followers of St. Vincent and St. Louise were among those congregations and associations that responded with enthusiasm to the re-examination and updating of their distinctive charism's expressions. In the process and along the way, they came to realize that they were not alone in carrying on the Vincentian charism. Now, an entire spiritual Family is rediscovering the links that connect and bring them together in the evangelization and service of the poor.

Where before the 1980's we spoke of a double family of St. Vincent, referring to the two original and direct foundations of the Congregation of the Mission (CM) and the Company of the Daughters of Charity (DC), nowadays we speak about a Vincentian Family that consists of more than 260 groups, institutes and movements sharing in the charism of Vincent and Louise. Aside from

the two mentioned above, among the more international groups in this Family are two lay groups: the Confraternities of Charities – Ladies of Charity, in fact Vincent's first foundation (1617) and now known as the International Association of Charities (AIC); and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP), the most numerous branch in the Family. Other international groups in the Family today include the many congregations of Sisters of Charity (notably those in the two Federations — in Strasbourg and North America — and that of St. Jean-Antide Thouret), the Brothers of Charity, Brothers and Sisters of Mercy, Vincentian Marian Youth (VMY), Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM), Religious of St. Vincent (RSV), Vincentian Lay Missionaries (MISEVI), etc.

These varied groups are either directly founded by St. Vincent and St. Louise, or founded subsequently by some members of the CM or DC, or follow the Rules of the Priests of the Mission or of the Daughters, or simply hold the two saints as patron saints. What unites and brings them together is the one mission of loving and serving those persons living in various forms of poverty and marginalization. The Vincentian Family today count among its members lay people and consecrated/ordained persons, men and women, young and elderly, rich and poor, Catholics and even non-Catholics. They feel called to act together in overcoming extreme poverty, malnutrition, poor health, illiteracy, migration, gender inequality, injustice, oppression, etc. While its more than one million members, a large majority of whom are lay volunteers, may not be able to eliminate all forms of poverty, they nevertheless represent a formidable and genuine force that could make a difference in the lives of the poor.

### **Charities and Missions Today: Programs that Empower the Poor**

The Vincentian charism, moreover, is being lived out today in the many concrete projects and programs in direct service of the poor. Since the 1600's, the twin pillars of Vincent's and Louise's interventions on behalf of the poor — missions or evangelization and works of charity (for the poor, elderly, children, handicapped, etc.) — have remained the principal commitments of various branches of the Vincentian Family. Thus, the CM Fathers and Brothers continue to conduct popular missions, work in seminaries and houses of formation for future priests, while the Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Charity, Sisters of Mercy, among others, are engaged in clinics, hospitals and health-related facilities, orphanages, food-distribution programs, etc. Several groups in the Family help the poor as they administer schools, colleges and even universities, and are involved in other forms of training and education. Many groups work with the



elderly, the youth, the handicapped, the street children, as well as persons in prisons, detention centers, etc. A good number of our predominantly women groups, like the AIC, DC, SC, work with poor women, either in improving maternal health, caring for their children, or in literacy and livelihood programs. Some of these projects that directly and concretely impact the lives of the poor have recently been duly recognized and awarded by governments and other institutions.

But besides these time-proven services, many of our VF branches have undertaken projects that assist those persons caught in "new forms of poverty," like HIV-AIDS patients and the drug-dependent, refugees, migrants, victims of war, and those culturally segregated. Furthermore, inspired in no small way by Vatican II's wider vision, our fellow "Vincentians" have been immersed in works for justice and peace, political education, community development, income-generating and micro-financing programs, housing and infrastructures projects, etc. Following the intuition of St. Vincent and St. Louise on an integrated perspective on poverty — as both material and spiritual — and recognizing the inter-working of various factors in society, the Vincentian Family has launched the program of "systemic change." This represents a prophetic step and a major re-thinking of its interventions in the lives of the poor. As Family we are not only called to provide the evident but temporary solace of food, shelter, clothing, health-care, etc., but most importantly we are to fight for the poor, defend their rights so as to bring about a change in those poverty-perpetuating structures, to harness their own involvement in this change, and thus create situations for sustainable development. Our works in Akamasoa (Madagascar), Payatas (Philippines) and Haiti are but a few of the many projects of this kind.

### **Solidarity, Collaboration and Partnership**

A most characteristic way by which the branches of our Family embody the Vincentian charism at present is the positive attitude towards solidarity, collaboration and partnership, particularly with the poor. Taking the cue from St. Vincent himself and his organizational skills, the Vincentian Family today seeks to involve various sectors of Church and society in the service of the poor. Present-day collaboration and partnership is taking place in our Family on various levels.

Within each branch, twinning programs either in projects for the poor or in formation sessions of members have become a very effective way of exercising corresponsibility between those with means and those with urgent needs. Among lay associations for example,

the SSVP and the AIC have fine-tuned this strategy, resulting into a broadened knowledge of world-wide poverty, a realistic awareness of available resources, as well as greater appreciation of institutional mission and of our Vincentian charism.

Among branches on the national level, various countries and even continents have organized VF Coordinating Councils for the purpose of synchronizing projects and activities. In Ireland, the CM, DC, SSVP have formed a "Millennium Partnership for Social Justice" to work for social and economic change as it tackles poverty and exclusion. On the international level, the Superiors General and international Presidents of various branches have met annually for the last 16 years to provide guidance to our common activities and international projects related to the fight against hunger, the annual observance of the feasts of St. Vincent and St. Louise, as well as the plans for extraordinary events like the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mother Seton's foundation, etc.

Partnership is being promoted also between our Vincentian Family branches and the other sectors of the Church and society. The AIC, for example, is represented in the Conference of Catholic Organizations, the Pontifical Council of the Laity, etc. The DC have taken on the DREAM project for HIV-AIDS victims in partnership with the Community of St. Egidio. The SSVP is coordinating with various chemical companies in order to produce a more affordable medicine for malaria. Many of our Family groups work closely with local parishes and their social arms, with some national branches of CARITAS, as well as with other religious congregations that minister also to the poor. Furthermore, several branches enjoy NGO representation before the United Nations and its various organs like the UNESCO, UNICEF, etc. In fact, many projects of the Vincentian Family address the UN's "Millennium Development Goal," especially those on reducing extreme poverty, empowering women, and developing global partnership. All this is becoming almost second nature to our Vincentian Family as it tries to do what St. Vincent and St. Louise did in the seventeenth century — raise the level of commitment on the part of the rich and the powerful to the plight of the poor. In promoting solidarity, partnership and collaboration without boundaries, our Family brings about change in the lives of the poor in an organized way.

### **Continuing Reflection on the "Vincentine Spirit"**

A fourth significant way of living out and embodying the Vincentian charism today is through a continuing reflection on the distinctive "spirituality" that undergirds our projects and programs.



Our Family has been single-minded in the belief that genuine formation in the spirit has to go in tandem with our projects and programs for the poor.

This spiritual vision is anchored on St. Vincent's seminal ideas: the discernment of and faithfulness to God's will, the identification of the poor with Christ, effective and affective charity, holistic service of body and soul, integral evangelization, the view of the poor as our "lords and masters," etc. Studies on these and other themes have helped deepen our understanding of and motivations in our work with the poor. Thus, formation sessions in the Vincentian "spirit and charism" continue to be a regular component of our gatherings and meetings, whether it is the annual Vincentian Studies session in Spain, the school of Vincentian Spirituality in Curitiba (Brazil), the session for Vincentian formators in Asia and Africa, the Vincentian Family Gathering in the US, the Continental Sessions for VF Advisors and Leaders (in Mexico, Brazil, Cameroon, Thailand, Europe and US-Canada) on Systemic Change, or the annual meeting of VF Superiors and International Heads. These formation sessions enable us to imbibe the richness of our fundamental vision and to inculcate and operationalize it in a given context of poverty and need.

Rooted in our life and experience with the poor, they especially lead us to enter into the revered place of encounter between the poor, God and ourselves, affording us the opportunity to become the simple, humble, and loving servants of the poor. In the process, like Mary, we give to the world a shining witness to God's love for all of humanity.

### **FAMVIN and the Website**

Finally, a creative and updated way of embodying our Vincentian charism is precisely through the diverse means of communication available today. Practically every branch of the Family maintains a website which is linked and connected to those of other branches. The Family website, FAMVIN, has served as the central information network by which Family members and those otherwise interested are able to grow in their knowledge of the Family's history, present activities and programs, and future plans. And to think that this is all taking place in English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German, Indonesian, etc.!

These different ways illustrate the vitality and validity of the Vincentian charism in many parts of the world today. Further, they confirm that not only has the Vincentian Family remained

faithful to the spirit and methodology of St. Vincent and St. Louise but that also it continually seeks to renew itself in that spirit while being open to new possibilities and strategies. Likewise they confirm us in our belief that the best way to respond to global poverty is with an equally global form of solidarity, collaboration and partnership.

In conclusion, it is good to be reminded of what St. Vincent told the Daughters of Charity concerning the origin of our charism. *"And that, (Sisters,) was the beginning of your Company. As it was not then what it is now, there is reason to believe that it is still not now what it will be later when God has perfected it as He wants it; for Sisters, do not think Communities are formed all at once. Saint Benedict, Saint Augustine, Saint Dominic, and all those great servants of God, whose Orders are so flourishing, never in the least dreamed of doing what they actually accomplished. But God acted through them"* (Vincent de Paul, 13 February 1646, CCD, 9:194).

St. Louise also shows us how we may imbibe this special charism given by God to us. *"'Blessed are they who....' Hunger and thirst are two urgent needs of nature, especially in strong bodies.... If our souls are healthy, they should have the same urges, not as passions, but as desires for justice.... It seems to me that justice consists of the general renunciation of all my passions which are contrary to the commandments of God and to the perfection that He expects of me, as well as that charity which in words, actions and attitudes I am obliged to render to my neighbor.... Thirst for justice... must lead us to desire greater things. We must long for union with God and the disposition and means to attain it. We must ardently desire that the effects of his holy will reign in us; and we must do all in our power to bring about this reign in others..."* (SLM, SW 733-734).

### Questions for Reflections

1. In your experience, what has inspired you to embrace the Vincentian charism?
2. What demands does this have on you and on your work with the poor?
3. What should you do to promote collaboration and partnership in the Vincentian Family, first in your country, and then, throughout the world?

Written by

Father MANUEL GINETE C.M., Delegate for the Vincentian Family



## Reflection 12

### VINCENT DE PAUL AND LOUISE DE MARILLAC. THE ART OF DECISION MAKING

Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac worked together for 35 years to improve the lives of all those who suffered from poverty or rejection by society and to reveal the great love of God for all to them.

#### Apparent Differences

Vincent de Paul, a Gascon peasant, was raised within a loving family.

*Louise de Marillac, a Parisian aristocrat, was rejected by her family because of her illegitimate birth.*

Vincent de Paul was an enterprising young man. He threw himself into a variety of undertakings, trying to get ahead and to find a fixed revenue.

*Louise de Marillac was raised in a convent and a boarding house and, as a young girl, she sought the hidden life in a Capuchin monastery.*

Vincent de Paul was a man with a peasant temperament. He knew how to wait, "Never to go ahead of Divine Providence."

*Louise de Marillac was a woman in a hurry to reach her goal and unafraid to challenge society or the Church. She was a Marillac.*

How were they able to live and work together while their upbringing and personalities could have kept them apart? How did they manage to communicate?

Around the age of 30, both were confronted by agonizing self-examination on God and on their future. Around 1613, Vincent de Paul was greatly tormented by doubts concerning God. He became conscious of the emptiness, the uselessness of his life as priest. About 1623, Louise de Marillac plunged into "a dark night of the soul," a period of depression. She questioned her life and her future and began to doubt the existence of God. Through these trials, both became aware of the goodness of God to them and desired to dedicate their lives to those who were poor. Their love for God and the poor will unite them.

But that in no way covers over their differences. Numerous examples allow us to discover Monsieur Vincent and Mademoiselle Le Gras' sometimes opposing choices. Listening to them, observing how they live should enable us to understand how they were capable of committing themselves together for a mission of charity and of accomplishing such important actions.

## SOME CONCRETE EXAMPLES

### Finding a new Mother House

When the Daughters of Charity were founded, Louise de Marillac opened her own home in the parish of St. Nicolas du Chardonnet to the five or six young women who desired to join her. In 1636, as the number of sisters was increasing, the little community moved to La Chapelle north of Paris. Four years later, the house was too small. They, therefore, had to find another residence. Louise has a very definite idea. Since 1632, Saint Lazare, in the Saint Denis District, had been the Mother House of the Priests of the Mission. Louise preferred to have the Daughters of Charity lodged in the same area. Vincent de Paul was very reticent:

*You may perhaps think that I have some reason which involves you on account of which I think it is unwise for you to live in this neighborhood. Oh, no, that is not the case, I assure you. The reason, rather, is this: we are among people who watch everything and pass judgment on everything. They would not see us go into your house three times without finding the opportunity to talk, to draw conclusions they ought not to draw, and to repeat them wherever they go (CCD, I, "To St. Louise," c. 1636, pp. 308-309).*

In September 1640, Vincent de Paul asks the Ladies of Charity to look around for a suitable house. On 1 November, Vincent is delighted by their proposal. This residence depends on the Priory of Saint Lazare both for local taxes and for judicial matters. Consequently, Monsieur Vincent invites Louise de Marillac to visit the house located in the village of La Villette:

*There is a small property in La Villette, just about an acre including the house and garden. It belongs to the parish of La Villette and comes under that house for dues and justice. It is the last house in the village beyond and on the same side as the church from which it is not so far as yours. They mentioned four or five thousand francs. There is a main building or two, with a barn and stable, country style, and it gets air on the side*



*and in the back. It is the only property for sale in La Villette; see what you think of it (CCD, II, "To St. Louise," 1 November 1640, pp. 150-151).*

Louise goes to see it. We do not have her letter commenting on her visit; however, she refused the proposal because she was looking for something else. It appears that this time she wants to overcome Vincent's reticence. The ladies then speak of a house in the Saint Martin District. In February Vincent goes to see it and finds it too small. He shares his views with Louise the morning of 7 February:

*Yesterday I saw the house that I had mentioned to you in the faubourg Saint Martin, but there is not enough room. It would be good, as you say, to have one for yourselves as soon as possible, but that is not so easily found. In the meantime, you will have to take the first one that is offered for rent (CCD, II, "To St. Louise," 7 February 1641).*

Louise must have reacted immediately. She wants the house purchased not rented. Clearly her letter expressed, without too much tact, her worry and impatience with the slowness of the process. (We do not have this letter). Vincent's response is not long in coming and it too lacks tact:

*As for the lodging in that parish, we must rent one at any the price, while waiting for the opportunity to buy one, as the kind we need does not turn up every day.*

*I still see a little of the human in your feelings as soon as you see me ill. You think all is lost for want of a house. O woman of little faith and acceptance the guidance and example of Jesus Christ! For the state of the whole Church, this Savior of the world refers to His Father with regard to rules and order, and for a handful of young women whom His Providence has so manifestly raised up and brought together, you think that He will fail us. Come, Mademoiselle, humble yourself very much before God in whose love I am your servant, Vincent de Paul (CCD, II, "To St. Louise," 7 February 1641, p. 177).*

Tension is high but both are going to reflect, striving to understand the reaction of the other. Vincent, while looking at the essential of the matter, calms the situation:

*We must keep on praying for the house; I am not so worried about it as about the way to set you up right now in a rented lodging. O, Jesus, Mademoiselle, your concerns do not depend on a house, but on the continuation of God's blessings on the work (CCD, II, "To St. Louise," February-March 1641, p. 189).*

A new proposal is presented: Madame Maretz, who lives on Boulevard Saint Denis directly across the street from Saint Lazare, proposes her small piece of property. An agreement is reached and the sale contract is signed 6 September 1641:

*We finally have the contract of purchase for the house and the money has been paid" (CCD, II, "To St. Louise," 6 or 7 September 1641, p. 210).*

The house was purchased for 12,000 pounds. The Congregation of the Mission assumed the cost because, at the time, The Daughters of Charity did not have the funds. The Company would not repay the Congregation of the Mission until 1653.

The different perspectives on the choice to be made led to frank and uncompromising exchanges. This discussion, without any apparent concession, allowed them to reach a solution that was accepted without afterthought. Respect overcame differences.

### **Accepting boys in the schools and boarders in the houses**

The council meetings of the Daughters of Charity often reveal the very different way Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac viewed the realities of the mission.

The council of 30 October 1647 studies two problems. Monsieur Vincent, who is presiding, presents the first point:

*Mademoiselle Le Gras questioned whether it is advisable for our sisters in towns and villages who teach school to take both boys and girls and, in the event they do take boys, to what age they will keep them (CCD, XIIIb, Council of 30 October 1647, p. 285).*

First, Mademoiselle's reasons for accepting the boys are put forth: These young boys will receive a foundation in piety; this could well be their only instruction. There is no school master for them. Moreover, the parents want their boys to have at least as much instruction as their girls. Moreover, it is recognized that these very young boys (under six) cannot be a temptation for the school mistress.

Vincent presents totally opposite reasons: Having boys and girls together is forbidden both by a decree of the king and one from the archdiocese. The sisters should be the first to carry out the ordinances. Vincent supports his view by recalling that school masters who accepted little girls among the boys were condemned to be burned alive.



The two sisters present are questioned; one is for, the other is against. Monsieur Lambert, Assistant of the Congregation of the Mission, favors the proposal. Mademoiselle reiterates her opinion, saying that she has sometimes accepted boys because there are occasions when a girl can only come to school if she brings her little brother with her as her mother is not at home to look after him.

After presenting his reasons once again, Vincent de Paul concludes:

*For all those reasons, Sisters, it will be well not to admit them at all. Two or three of us feel the same way. It should be left at that (Ibid., p. 288).*

Louise thus has to revisit what she has authorized in some houses.

This is followed by consideration of the question of whether or not the sisters could accept boarders in their houses. Here also, there is a great difference of opinion between the two founders. Louise sees advantages in it: education of the girls; financial assistance for poor houses. Vincent sees too many inconveniences: different meals for the boarders (Vincent thought the sisters' menu was too meager!); risk that the sisters would let community differences show; difficulties in maintaining a balance between tending to these boarders and fidelity to the rule (prayer). Despite Louise's insistence, Vincent's decision was categorical:

*Leave matters as they are and do not accept them anywhere (Ibid., p. 291).*

Louise de Marillac will have to communicate this decision to the different houses while not letting her opposition to it show. Thus, she wrote to Barbe Angiboust in May 1655:

*Monsieur Vincent is especially pleased when he hears news of you. He thinks that you should give up your boarders. He says that it is not for Daughters of Charity to keep them. As a matter of fact, it was decided at a Council meeting which was held to discuss several matters that, for good reasons, they should not accept them (Spiritual Writings, "To Sister Barbe Angiboust," c. May 1655, p. 468).*

A decision taken after common reflection cannot be contested by any member. Full adherence to a council decision after deliberation is essential.

If the question is to be revisited, it can only be after another common reflection. In 1659, the need to accept boarders is raised by the sisters from La Fère. Louise tells them:

*As for the boarders, reflect on the necessity and importance of having them, and then be good enough to inform me of your conclusions. I will then request a decision from our Most Honored Father and communicate his orders to you* (Spiritual Writings, "To Sister Mathurine Guérin," 1 November 1659, p. 652).

Louise agrees to revisit a decision made 12 years earlier. But she asks the sisters to reflect together on their motives, to clearly spell out their motivation, and to send this to her. The mission evolves, responses to situations need to adapt. A decision made at one time can be modified if circumstances change. One cannot continuously adhere to what has always been done.

Was there a council meeting and reflection on this subject? Most likely not, as Louise's letter is from the end of November 1659!

### The Bellarmine catechism and the Daughters of Charity

The Daughters of Charity taught catechism to little girls in the parishes. For this, they had a little catechism composed of questions and answers drawn up by Louise de Marillac. Some of the sisters wanted to have a deeper understanding of their faith. What option should be presented to them?

Monsieur Lambert, Priest of the Mission, recommended the Bellarmine catechism, which Louise found much too learned. During the council meeting of March 1648, the question is debated. Once again, the great difference in perspective is revealed:

*Mademoiselle, there is no better catechism than Bellarmine's. When all our sisters know it and teach it, they will only be teaching what they should because they are there to instruct others and they will know what the pastors must know* (CCD, XIIIb, Council of March 1648, p. 664).

And Vincent de Paul goes even further. He urges Louise de Marillac to read and explain the Bellarmine catechism to the sisters:

*It would be well to have it read to the sisters and for you, yourself, to explain it to them so that they all may learn it thoroughly so as to be able to teach it; for, if they have to teach it, they also have to know it and there is no better way to learn it more completely than from that book* (Ibid.).

To be opposed to a decision and to see it imposed on one for the common good, such was the situation Louise accepted. She will make every effort to understand the benefits.



## Real and Effective Work Together

In closing, I would like to show how Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac were able to get beyond their profound differences. Numerous encounters allowed them to become aware of their own identities, to discover how they complemented one another, to aid one another in reaching fulfillment and thus to accomplish real and efficacious work.

## Appreciation of the other

To accept the personalities of those with whom we work is often difficult. It requires accepting to see others with their qualities and their defects. This implies, first of all, knowing ourselves with our strengths and weaknesses. Little by little, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac learned to appreciate one another and expressed what they found good or bad in each other.

Vincent de Paul quickly came to admire Louise de Marillac's great competence in her dealings with the Ladies of Charity and he does not hesitate to tell her so:

*I am satisfied with everything you told me about the Charity. Please propose to the sisters whatever you find appropriate in that regard, and draw it up, as much according to what you have written to me as to what you will consider best (CCD, I, "To St. Louise," 2 April 1631, p. 101).*

He also does not hesitate to point out a fault that could be prejudicial to her action. Louise is leaving with Madame Goussault to visit a Confraternity:

*I beg Our Lord to bless your trip.... Please be very cheerful... even though you should have to lessen a bit that somewhat serious disposition which nature has bestowed on you and which grace is tempering... (CCD, I, "To St. Louise," 30 August 1638, pp. 491-492).*

Vincent will also tell the Superioress of the Company that she is too demanding of the young sisters in formation. Sister Vincente has arrived in Richelieu and Louise is complaining about her slowness to absorb what she has been told. Vincent recommends patience to her:

*She is a very fine young woman, with a good reputation in her own region and has perseveringly served her mistress for 7 or 8 years. This poor woman is inexpressibly pained by her absence. There are some persons that do not adjust at first to every little*

*rule. Time takes care of everything. I experience that situation everyday among ourselves* (CCD, II, "To St. Louise," 1640 or 1641, p. 166).

Louise has a strong personality which reveals itself in her tenacity. When she sees what she believes to be the will of God, she goes forward. She then uses a strong expression: "In the name of God." If Vincent is ill, she vigorously imposes rest:

*In the name of God, Monsieur, you know that you must take some time to recover your health and attempt to maintain it for the service of God* (Spiritual Writings, "To Monsieur Vincent," 11 August 1646, p. 161).

Faced with the lack of money to pay the board for the foundlings, Louise asserts her suffering and firmly exhorts Vincent de Paul to act. For her, there is only one solution, no longer to accept new children:

*In the name of God, my Most Reverend Father, consider whether we should persuade these Ladies not to accept new foundlings... we can no longer stifle the pity aroused in us by these poor people who beg us who beg us for what we justly owe them... they are afraid of dying of hunger and are forced to come from quite a distance, three or four times, without receiving any money.... Please excuse my constant insistence* (Spiritual Writings, "To Monsieur Vincent," February 1650, p. 316).

### To accept mutuality

To accept mutuality is to acknowledge that the other makes up for what we lack. Louise quickly says what she thinks. She apologizes to Vincent de Paul for this while sending him letters and asking him to respond without delay:

*Please excuse me for expressing my thoughts to you so readily* (Spiritual Writings, "To Monsieur Vincent," 1651, p. 383).

If Louise recognizes her hastiness, Vincent does not hesitate to acknowledge that, on the other hand, prudence makes him slow. One balances the other.

*My God, Mademoiselle, how fortunate you are to possess the antidote for eagerness! The works God Himself is accomplishing are never spoiled by the inactivity of men. Please trust in Him...* (CCD, I, "To St. Louise," 13 October 1639, p. 588).



Vincent does not dare send the many people seeking his advice or assistance away. He recognizes this and lets himself be overwhelmed.

*Because I am involved up to my ears with a large number of retreatants: an appointed bishop, a First President, two doctors, a professor in theology, and M. Pavillon, in addition to exercises. All that, I must say, prevents me from coming to see you. That is why I am asking you to please send me the reminder you mentioned to me (CCD, I, "To St. Louise," May or June 1632, pp. 159-160).*

But, because Louise does not accept Vincent's abandoning the Conferences to the Daughters of Charity, a day or two before the date, she sends a little reminder. "Also remember the need we have for the conference you so kindly promised us for tomorrow, Thursday" (Spiritual Writings, "To Monsieur Vincent," 2 May 1646, p. 145).

The complementary aspect of their relationship continues to grow. Each brings his/her stone to the construction of the work willed by God. This is revealed in the drawing up of the Rules of the Daughters of Charity.

*Those are the things I have noticed, my Most Honored Father. However, in the name of God, pay no attention to either my notes or my remarks. Instead, tell us to do what you believe God is asking of us. Please add the maxims and instructions which will encourage us and keep us faithful and exact in the observance of all the points of our Rule... (Spiritual Writings, "To Monsieur Vincent", c. 1651, p. 388).*

Sanctity was not innate to either of them. As with all the saints, this journey was supported by their humanity. Little by little, their encounters transformed and perfected their personalities, and made them more attractive. Their differences became a source of enrichment for their common mission. Vincent and Louise will explain to the sisters that they must live in union among themselves while accepting their diversity. To help them, they present the Blessed Trinity as their model:

*Remember me to all our sisters and tell them always to remember the advice of Monsieur Vincent especially forbearance and cordiality so as to honor the unity and diversity of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity (Spiritual Writings, "To Sister Jeanne Lepintre," 1 June 1649, p. 289).*

**Questions for reflection**

1. In the face of our differences, how can we foster mutual respect among the members of each group and among the different branches of the Vincentian Family?
2. How can we make the service of the poor the criterion that unites us despite our differences?

Written by  
Sister ELISABETH CHARPY, DC, Province of France North

Translation: Sister LOUISE SULLIVAN, DC, Province of Albany



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